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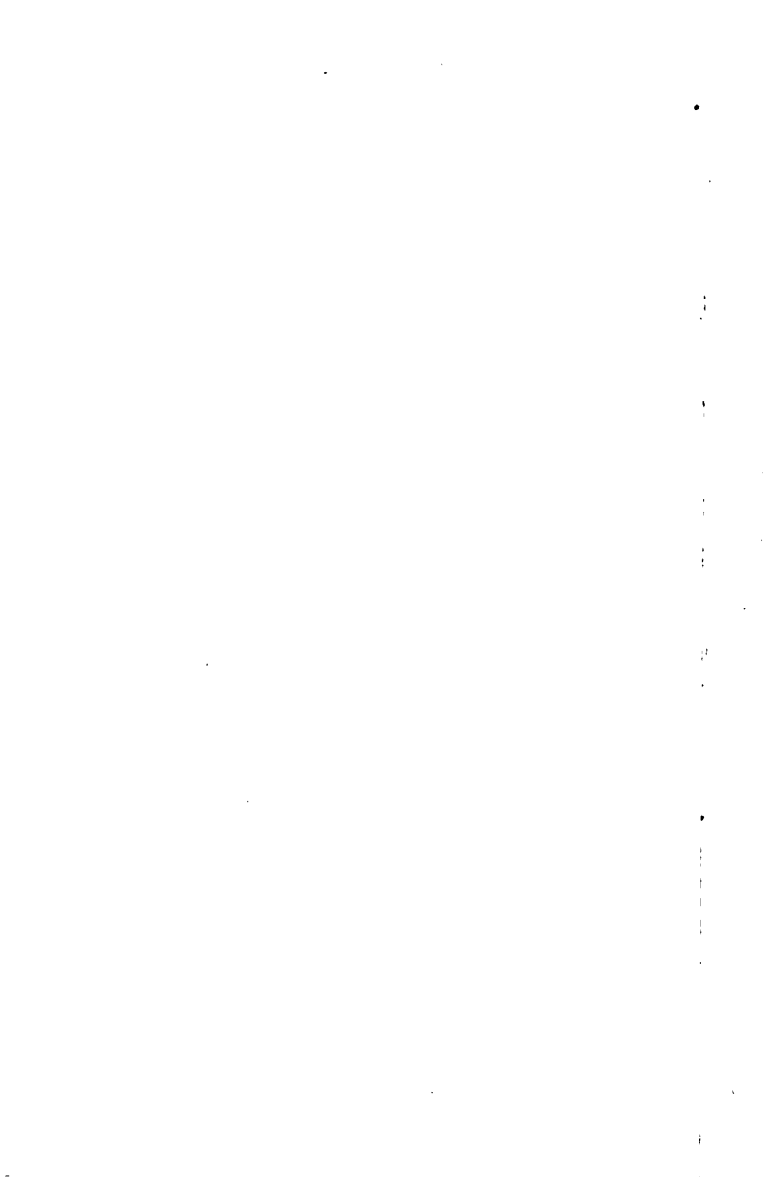
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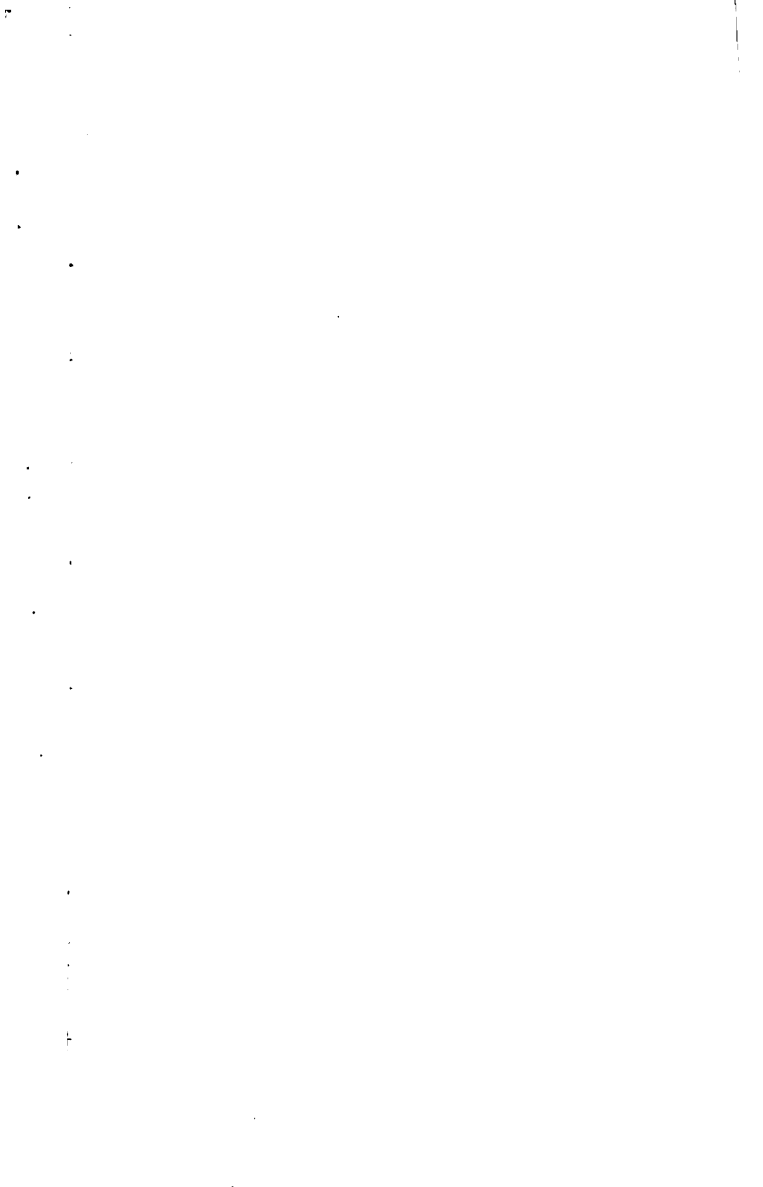
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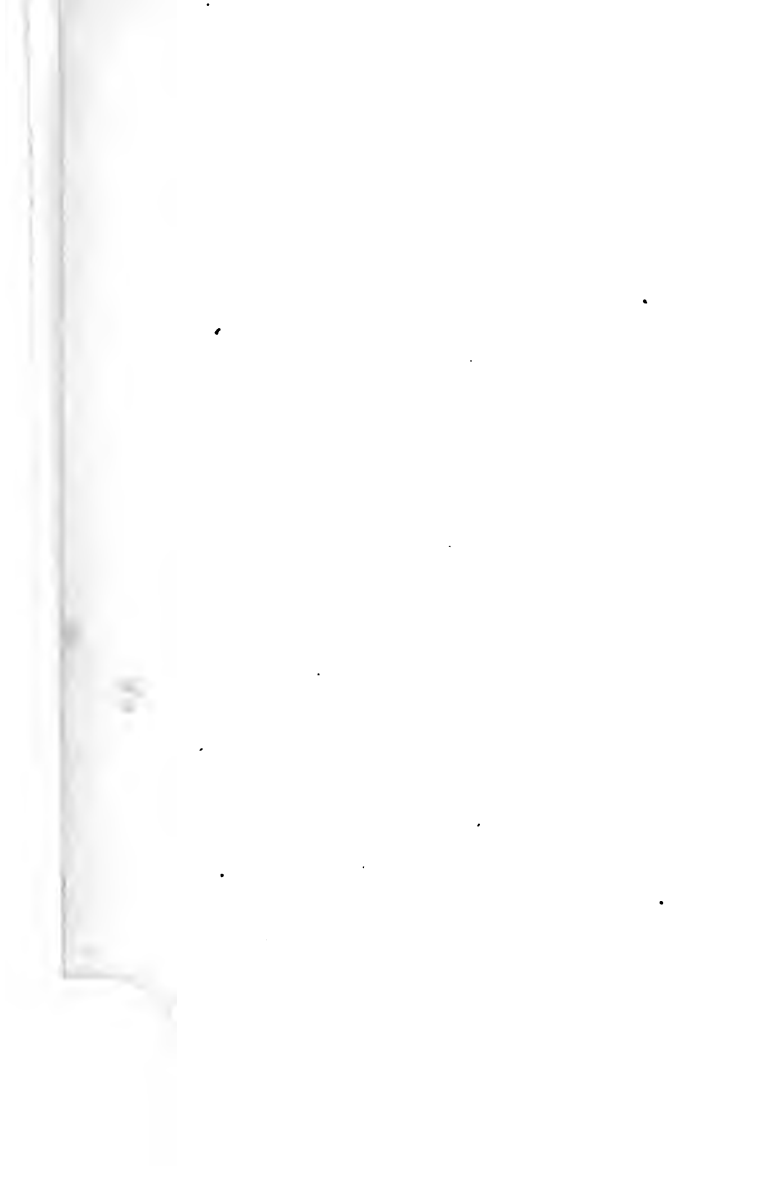
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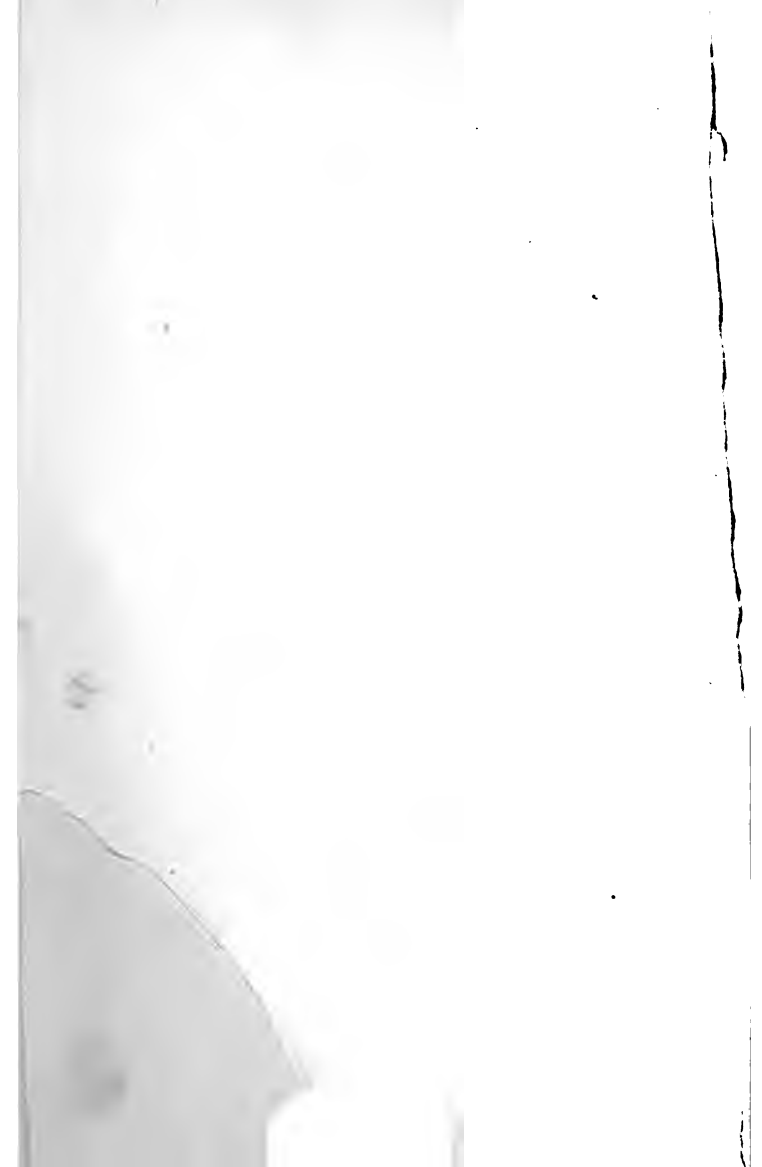
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"IS THE GENTLEMAN ANONYMOUS? IS HE A GREAT U

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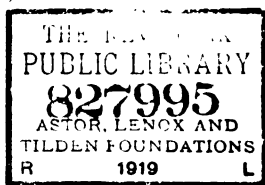
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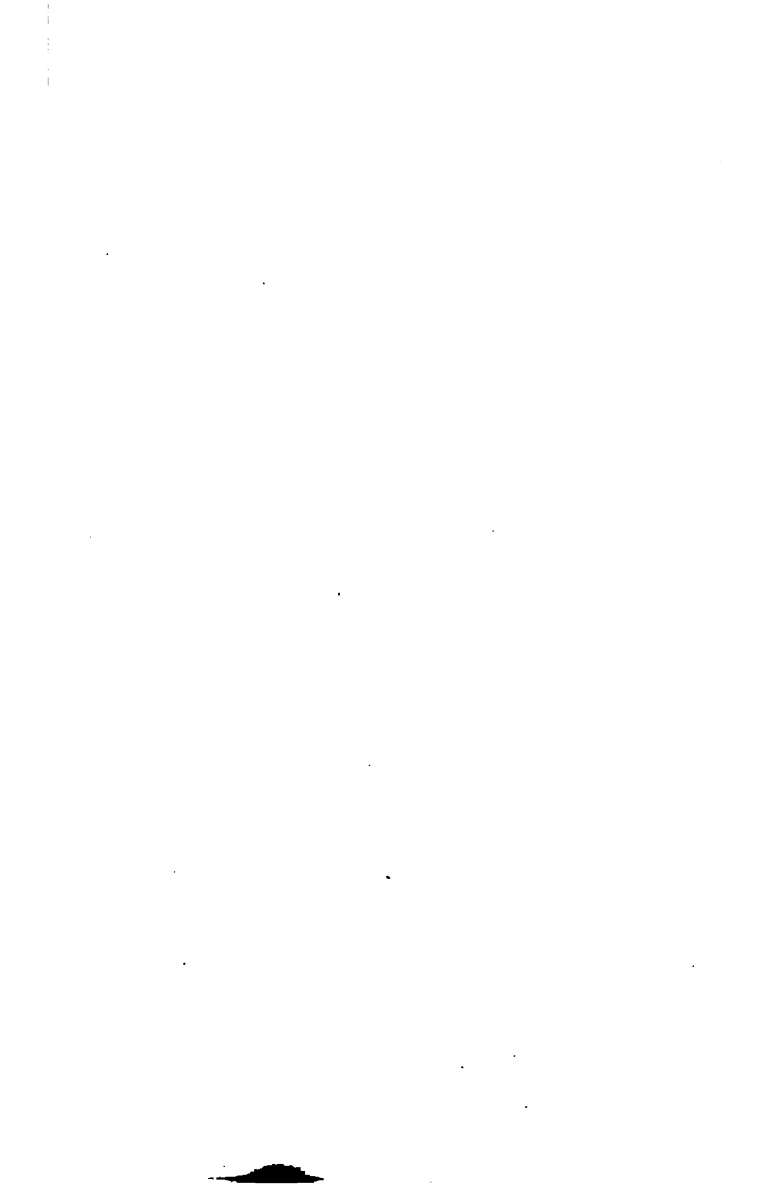
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NEW YORK
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*have beautiful well-rounded lives; others
pplementary lives, woven in here and there with
er peoples', to eke them out where they are wanting,—
never quite blended with any one life, or taking a com-
pleted form of their own. These do not look quite so
satisfactory,—perhaps, because we do not see enough of
them; they are curves of grander circles, that pass out
of our ken."*—OLDBURY, by Annie Keary.



G E M I N I.



CHAPTER I.

"But on and up, where Nature's heart
Beats strong among the hills."

RICHARD MONCKTON MILNES.

THE town of Beebury was very small: so limited in area, that, from the first farmhouse on Honey Hill to the last saw-mill in Hive Hollow, was a distance of only five miles; so insignificant in population, that, beginning with Gran'sir' Collins, who would be ninety-six next Thanksgiving time, and ending with Mrs. Jehiel Baker's week-old baby, it could not number quite seven hundred souls. A pitifully small place indeed, and quite ashamed of itself as recorded in the last National Census, but — there are always compensations — you could walk all over it in a summer day, see all over it from the belfry of its one "meeting-house;" and every

family in it was personally known, if not related, to every other family. Everybody knew everybody else's history, and was interested in everybody else's affairs. A grief on the Hill in the morning was a grief in the Hollow before night; a joy in the Hollow was, with equal certainty and promptness, a cause of rejoicing on the Hill.

Elder Mason, the well-beloved pastor of the one parish, was able to, and did, visit each of its families twice a year, and took tea with them all once. Everybody was known by his or her "given name;" and the intricacies of relationship and intermarriage were such as to bewilder the brain, and defy the comprehension of any one not born and bred in the place.

One keen November night, every mother, at least, in the little town, was lying awake, and praying for the Elder's wife; and when, in the early dawn, the rattle of the Doctor's gig was heard on the frozen road, many a window was raised, many a head thrust out into the bitter, stinging

cold: a curious variety of heads,—in all sorts of wrappings, hastily snatched from bed or chair; heads in home-woven blankets of blue-and-white-bar pattern; heads in quilted petticoats or plaid shawls, in stuffy “comfortables,” in red-flannel nightcaps with ear-pieces; and one poor, good old soul was actually wrapped in the braided rag-mat snatched in her hurry and excitement from beside her bed. But the friendly darkness hid all these eccentricities. There was great variety in the voices too: but the Doctor knew them all; and the most notable fact of the affair was, that from all these differing heads and varying voices—from Deacon Sawyer’s big, white house on the green to the “Widder Flanders’s” in the Hollow—came the same question; and this it was, “Any news up to the Elder’s, Doctor?” And back to all came the same hearty reply, “Twin girls; and all’s well!”

“*Fiminy!*” cried the old woman in the rag mat, with unconscious aptness.

CHAPTER II.

"A Mother in Israel."

"So sways she level in her husband's heart." — TWELFTH NIGHT.

THE excitement that prevailed throughout the village on the following day had not been equalled since the memorable occasion, three years before, when the Elder had brought his wife home, a stranger to all, a "slim, cityfied, little thing," whom he had met when teaching in a Southern State to pay his college expenses.

The transplanted flower had never taken kindly to the cold and rugged soil to which her husband brought her; had never been popular among the people, except with the younger girls. The deacons and other wise men shook their heads on the very first view of her delicate, insipid face, and childish figure. "The Elder's a

master-fine scholar, but dretful onpractical," they said. "He 'd better get a glass case, if he 'spects 'to keep that little creetur." Their wives looked askance at her fashionable dress and tiny, white hands, and remarked, "What an awful pity 't was he hadn't a-picked out one of the girls in his own choir,—some one that knowed the ways of the place, and could turn off a day's work and go to sewin'-circle too." But the Elder was satisfied. Shy, reserved, absent-minded scholar that he was, he never knew that his house was not tidily kept, that his meals were ill cooked, and his linen less well mended than when Samanthy Ann Jackman had kept every thing "redd up," in his bachelor days. He never súsppected that his wife was "lazy," or "shif'less," or "sickly," or "one o' the do-nothin', complainin' kind." To him, she was ever lovely, ever fair and young and perfect. He never blamed her for want of sympathy in his parish work, never suspected that she was not content, never wearied of her little songs,

her childish prattle, her doll-like beauty. No matter if he found the kitchen fire out, and supper unprepared, when he came home from a long round of visits in a wet day. It was no hardship to him to bring in wood and water, and to cut the bread because "her hands were not strong enough;" to go down cellar for the pie and butter, because she "was *so* afraid of toads;" to knead the bread, even, because she "never *could* make it light." No; he would do all this cheerfully, and feel well repaid by one kiss from her pretty mouth on his sallow cheek; one loving touch of her inefficient, little hand on his lanky hair. And, though any one of his brother ministers in the county could have told him that his wife was "no companion for him, quite shallow in fact, and the wonder was what he could see in her to attract him," — they were restrained by the simple dignity of his character, the touching completeness of his delusion, and never betrayed their opinions, nor did he ever suspect them. As little did he

know what Doctor Hopkins could have told him, — that his wife had no vigor of constitution, and that every winter told more and more upon her strength; every “poor spell” left her weaker than the last.

But she, the poor, little, misplaced woman, knew it all. She realized the pitying contempt of the parishioners; the impossibility of ever adapting herself to them; her own inefficiency, mental and physical, for the duties of her position; the difference between her housekeeping and that of the notable wives around her; the fond blindness of her husband's love; and even her own wasting health. Yes, she knew it all, and — heroic at least in this — kept it all in her own heart, and was ever apparently happy and hopeful before him, until — But we are anticipating, and must go back to the day of excitement following the birth of the twins.

Great was the amount of visiting that day. Every good wife wanted to talk over the news with her neighbors; every one wanted to send

something to the young mother, — if possible to have a peep at the babies, or a personal report of their exact weight and complexion from Samantha Ann Jackman, now re-installed as housekeeper (and nurse). At least twenty times that day, this much-enduring woman was required to state upon honor, which parent the pink-faced mites “favored most;” whether both were likely to live; whether names had been selected for them; what they weighed, separately and together, and whether they arrived Thursday night or Friday morning, this latter fact being supposed to decide definitively whether they were to be “merry and glad” in temper, or “sour and sad.”

The offerings were even more various than the questions; pats of butter, fresh eggs, pitchers of cream, brown bread and white (“to save Samantha’s cookin’”), cake, cheese, and preserves enough to insure dyspepsia to the Elder for weeks, a pair of homespun blankets, bunches of dried camomile, anise-seed,

sage, catnip, saffron, and wormwood, a patchwork "spread," a set of white dimity window-curtains, with ball fringe, ditto of table-covers, three boxes of honey, two pewter porringers, a lace-trimmed night-cap,—"agin' the time she sets up and sees folks,"—three pin-cushions, baby clothes without number,——"not s'posin' two had been cal'lated on,"—and five cradles, for the same good reason.

Nothing else was talked of for many days. The single question of names employed the public imagination—the feminine portion of it, at least—for a whole fortnight; and the suggestions made would have filled an ordinary school copy-book. Scripture nomenclature predominated, of course, as these were parson's children. Mrs. Deacon Sawyer said that "Trypheny and Tryphosy seemed to be almost p'inted out by Providence for twin girls," and had quite a fierce argument on the subject with Mrs. Deacon Andrews, who was firm in her preference for Mary and Martha. Ruth and Naomi, Eunice

and Lois, had supporters too: while the younger matrons approved of Faith and Hope, Grace and Love; and Samantha herself was an advocate of Patience and Prudence.

The young girls held a secret caucus, wherein were mentioned such worldly names as Lily and Rose, Arabella and Isabella; and one ingenious maiden remarked that "Samuella and Marietta would be a sweet compliment to the parents," the Elder being named Samuel, and his wife Maria. Suffice it to say, that none of these suggestions were adopted, and all the heart-burning and jealousy which would have prevailed among the ninety-nine suggesters, had the one-hundredth been fortunate, were happily avoided. Mrs. Mason took the matter into her own hands, and startled, shocked, not to say scandalized, the whole parish by naming the helpless innocents *Penserosa* and *Allegra*.

CHAPTER III.

“What mighty contests rise from trivial things.” — POPE.

THUS it happened. The Elder sat by his wife's bedside one evening, the twins, now two weeks old, asleep on a pillow near by. As yet, he had scarcely realized the fact of his fatherhood, his whole heart being occupied with gratitude that his “dearly beloved” (for so he always called his wife, within himself, and in the rare moments when he showed his love for her in words) his “dearly beloved,” we say, had passed through a season of great danger, and been brought back to him. His plain, rugged, earnest face was now shining with this joyful thought ; his eyes were fixed with almost reverent love upon her pale features ; and, with one of his great hands, he gently stroked her

little, thin one, as it lay upon the gay square of the "album quilt," presented by the ladies of his congregation at the last donation-paragraph but one.

"You find yourself gaining a little, Maria?" remarked the good man, interrogatively, after long, peaceful silence, broken only by the pleasant snapping of the hickory-wood fire. "Not yet, dear," she replied; then, seeing his face fall, "perhaps it isn't time yet—only two weeks you know." "Oh, ah, yes; only two weeks—not time yet—probably not, my dear probably not." And the Elder smiled encouragingly, and bethinking himself that his remark betrayed great ignorance, and might trouble his wife, he continued "there is no hurry Maria: Samantha is a very well-intentioned person, and does her best to make me comfortable, and though, of course, the house cannot look as it does when my well beloved herself, is—is—flitting about," (O poor Samantha!) "still it behooves us to have pa-

tience, oh, certainly — patience and prudence both.”

“Why, husband!” cried Mrs. Mason, with a nervous, little laugh, “I should think Samantha had been talking to you too. Fancy her recommending me to name the children ‘Patience and Prudence’!”

“*The Children!*” ejaculated the Elder, bewildered for an instant, “children?” Then recollecting himself, and blushing like a boy, “Oh, yes, certainly, the children; and they must be named, to be sure.”

“Yes, but I told her I couldn’t think of calling them by any such prim, old-timy names as those: I must have something pretty and poetical, and you must help me think, dear.”

“We couldn’t name both for you, I suppose,” he timidly suggested, “but one” —

“Oh, no!” she objected: “Maria is so stiff and ugly! Let us not have any family names, or Bible, either: the whole village is full of them; let us have something new and orig-

inal. But I am tired now ; I must try to sleep : and you must be sure and have some names ready to suggest to me when you come in again."

The Elder kissed her forehead, and tiptoed awkwardly away ; passing through the kitchen to gain his study, he was waylaid by Samantha the faithful, who was darning his "feeting" (as she would have called the coarse, blue, yarn socks) by the light of two home-dipped, tallow candles.

"Ef you ain't too busy, Elder, I'll git you to step inter the back-room, and sottle which o' them there cradles you'd ruther keep ; 'cause Hiram he's a-goin' by afore light to-morrer, with his wood-sled, and he c'n jes' as well's not take the others hum."

"*Cradles ?*" cried the good parson, in despairing staccato.

"Yes, *sir*," returned Samantha, briskly taking one of the dips, and leading the way into the long, unpainted, rough-raftered room which con-

nected the house and barn. "You see, the neighbors is so orful tickled 'bout them twins, they can't do nor send enough,—and there the cradles be,—five on 'em. This here red one's Mis' Deacon Sawyer's, and that's Polly Ann Barnes's, with the blue gingham frill on't; and them two onpainted ones come from the Holler; and that yaller-streak-ed one 's from Mis' Holdin's. We 'd orter pick 'n choose out two, an' let the rest go hum, 'fore I scour up in here, Sat'day. They're orfle clutterin' things, and I've 'most broke my neck over 'em time-and-agen a'ready."

The Elder gazed helplessly at the five, while a depressing sense of the terrible responsibilities of his new relationship stole over him. At last he said,—

"Samantha, I leave it to your judgment; keep whichever you think best, and let your brother convey the others home, with my—with Mrs. Mason's kindest thanks."

"Sence you leave it to me, sir, and seein' as

how three on 'em 's sure to be mad, anyhow, I 'll keep this here with the frill, 'cause it's kinder fancifl, and 'll please Mis' Mason ; and this here smallest onpainted one, 'cause it's Widder Green's, an' she's poor, an' her feelin's is so dreffle easy hurt. An' I 'll send hum this great, gormin' red one — (it looks jes' like Mis' Sawyer, in that flamin' cotton-an'-wool de laine she's so fond o' wearin' to sewin' s'iety) ; an' this o' Mis' Holdin's don't hold none o' *our* babies, arter three o' her'n's died in it : an' that other 's got a squeak in the rockers, that sets all my teeth on aidge." It is needless to say that the Elder was safe in his study long before Samantha had ended her remarks, and there he soon forgot both children and cradles.

As the tall clock in the kitchen struck twelve, he came forth to go to bed in the "best room," of late assigned to him ; but, softly as he stepped, and loudly as the good Samantha was snoring, his wife heard, and called him in. Her little fingers were hot, and her voice quick and feverish, as she clasped his hand, saying :—

"Oh, husband, I've had such a happy dream about old times! We were back home in dear old Virginia, in the white-washed summer-house by the creek, and you were reading to me, just as you used to; and I had on a white, thin dress again, and red pomegranate flowers in my hair, and plenty more of them blooming on the bushes in the garden, and the air full of the smell of the roses. You were reading, out of Pa's old Milton, those two short pieces that I always would like better than 'Paradise Lost,' and I was playing with two great, white magnolia buds, till, suddenly, they turned into little babies, and I said, 'Let's name them for the poems;' and then I waked up, and I can't remember those names, and it tires me so to think! What were they, husband? Those pretty Italian words that you said meant merry and sad, or something like that?"

"You must mean 'Il Penseroso' and 'L'Allegro,' my well-beloved," he answered soothingly; "That was a very sweet dream, dear. Yes, we

were happy in our careless youth, Maria, and we are happy now, thank God, though in a soberer fashion, perhaps; yet, let us hope, more useful."

"Oh, not I!" she cried excitedly. "You are always doing good: but I am a useless, silly, little creature; and it will be all the better for you, and the babies too, perhaps, that I cannot stay with you." She spoke so wildly that he was quite alarmed, and hastened to say, —

"You are feverish, my dear, your dream has excited you. There, there, lie down and rest;" and he stroked her hair with trembling, anxious hands.

"But you will never forget me, will you? And you will tell my little girls about me, and you will name them as I dreamed, no matter what the people say — won't you?"

"Yes, yes, my beloved, only lie down, and be calm, and let me give you something to make you sleep!" But, here, one of the little ones lifted up a wailing voice, and the faithful nurse

was awake instantly. In one moment she had projected herself into an astounding wrapper, laid the baby in its mother's arms (thus effectually quieting both), and banished the Elder unceremoniously to his own domains, where he thought anxiously, and prayed long, for his wife. "She was certainly feverish," he said to himself again and again; striving by iteration to smother his fears; "it was the excitement of the dream, that was surely all." But the pang remained,—the shadow of a life-long sorrow had begun to fall.

CHAPTER IV.

"I see a hand you cannot see, which beckons me away." — TICKELL.

MRS. MASON was so much like her usual gentle self next day, that the Elder almost forgot his alarm. She remembered her dream, however, and clung to her fancy of naming the twins, in spite of Samantha's sniffs and Doctor Hopkins's frank ridicule.

The Elder had consented, suggesting only a feminine termination to the names, and why should she care for any one else? "This little one with the dark hair shall be Penserosa, and the one with the dimple in her chin shall be Allegra." So it was settled, and Beebury had to make the best of it.

Meanwhile, the short winter days were slipping quietly, monotonously away. All the

brooks and mill-ponds lay silent under clear black ice: then came the snow, storm upon storm, till it lay four and six, and in drifted places, even ten feet deep. Again and again the neighbors yoked their oxen, and drove great wood-sleds, laden with screaming boys and girls, up and down between the Hill and the Hollow, breaking open the road. Often that rude sculptor, the Wind, would come after them, and in one night destroy all signs of their labor, tossing up beautiful domes here, and scooping out exquisite, fluted alcoves there,—calling on his friend Sleet to polish all, that they might glitter bravely and mockingly in the morrow's sun.

The wood-roads became grand arcades; for the slenderer birches and hemlocks, bent down from either side by their weight of snow, met and froze together in fantastic arches and icicle-hung galleries, beside which the boasted cathedrals of Milan and Cologne were but rudimentary work. But, though month followed

month, Mrs. Mason grew no stronger. The hours were fewer and fewer in which she was able to talk with her husband, or to hear him read: but she loved to have him sit beside her and hold her hand while she dozed or dreamed; and he — neglecting all parish-work save preaching — wrote and studied, hoped and feared; went out but little, shrinking from the curiosity-alloyed sympathy of his people; dividing his time between his books and the sick-room; finding now and then a rude relief from sad thoughts in sawing and splitting wood to feed the big fires required by the severe weather. Samanthy toiled early and late, keeping every thing shiningly clean, and wearing always a cheerful face, though she knew only too well what sorrowful change was drawing near.

Every night the Elder would resolve upon having a plain talk with the Doctor; but every day he shrank from it, trying to believe young mothers were always so weak; that spring would restore his "well-beloved." But rough-

voiced, warm-hearted Samantha had faced the fear, and had her interview with the Doctor long ago, burying the secret in her own mind, and going about as vigorously as before, saying to herself, — "'Tain't no use setten' down and grievin', when I've got the poor little creetur, and them twins, and that blessed, helpless Elder, and all the critters, and the chores on my shoulders to onst. Now's the time for you to show your grit, ef you've got any, Samantha Ann Jackman, and so I tell you!" And the babies grew and thrived, and were exhibited to admiring neighbors by their proud and faithful nurse; but the young mother sank and wasted slowly and surely, until at last, one bright, thawing day in mid-April, when the great drifts began to settle and soften beneath the sun's rays; when the rapid dripping of the eaves seemed to be singing a merry song of spring; when the hemlocks shook off the last of their icy fetters, and tossed their plummy boughs freely in the mild breeze; when the air without was full of an

indescribably delicious, hope and promise, — the weary little wife and mother drifted out of life, her last breath a pathetic cry, “Oh, don’t forget me!” her last look one of yearning, unspeakable love into her husband’s eyes — and then — her brief story was ended; and all weakness, shallowness, insignificance, and short-coming, for ever covered and condoned by the awful dignity, the tender pathos, of her early death.

CHAPTER V.

"Cheerful yesterdays, and confident to-morrows." — WORDSWORTH.

TEN years passed away: ten times the spring sunshine melted the snow-drifts on the Beebury hill-pastures, and wooed into bloom — shyly creeping under last year's leaves — the fragrant, pink and white clusters of the trailing arbutus, still lovingly called "mayflower" in New England. Ten Junes made the same pastures rosy with the more lavish glories of the sturdy laurel bushes; through ten glowing Octobers, the children and the squirrels hunted and stored beech-nuts, chestnuts, hickory-nuts, and butter-nuts; while their elders barrelled their "Baldins and Sweetin's," carried home their golden corn and pumpkins, and spread out, in sunny corners of "L" roofs, the crook-

necked winter squashes, carefully covered with old bed-quilts, each frosty night.

Ten times the whirling snows of winter tried to hide the one marble shaft in the little graveyard, as if envious of its whiteness, as it stood alone among the blue slate slabs; but though they often covered the text, "Hers was the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit," and even the dates, and the Elder's name, they had never yet concealed the highest words, — "*Maria, beloved wife.*"

• Ten years had sprinkled the Elder's hair with white, bent his shoulders, and scored his sober, dreamy face; but Samanthy was as straight, as keen-eyed, as "spry," and as neat as ever; not a gray hair in her shining, sandy, tightly pinned braids, though she was "goin' on forty-five" and scorned to conceal the fact.

As the Elder, after his wife's death, forgot, or shrank from, his accustomed duties in woodshed and barn, "Hiram he," as Samanthy usually styled her half-brother, had been called in; at

first, only for the "night 'n' mornin' chores;" then for a "week's spell at the garding;" but finally, on his mother's death, to be a regular inmate, and valued member of the family. Twenty years younger, and of a more easy and genial temper than his sister, he had proved a blessing indeed to Penny and Lally, as the motherless twins were popularly called. Many and many a stormy, winter afternoon, when their father was shut up in his study, and Samanthy was "tidyin' up and scourin' round" in the kitchen and "butt'ry," had the little girls spent happily in the long, unpainted back-room, eagerly listening to Hiram's stories, as they leaned against his shoemaker's bench; for, like many another New England boy, Hiram had learned a trade, and worked at it when farm duties were over, or the weather bad. That high, desk-like bench, of dark, use-polished, much be-jack-knifed wood, was as curious and charming to them, as a piano to city-bred babies. Its little drawers, full of white, oat-like pegs, with which Hiram let them

fill their toy dishes when they played "tea-set," its row of leathern loops, in which the hammers and awls were thrust; the heavy, slippery lasts, the forbidden blacking-bottle, and paste-dipper; even the high, shiny stool Hiram sat on, and the grimy, ticking apron he wore when working, — were dear and honorable in the eyes of these children, for ever suggestive of peace and comfort and "a good time." Years and years after, the faintest smell of leather would bring back to each, in a moment, the old brown-raftered room; the sound of rushing rain on roof and small-paned windows; the comfortable smell of frying pancakes coming through the crack of the kitchen door; the funny, shrewd face of Hiram, with his black eyebrows meeting over his laughing eyes, as he deftly struck each peg into its appointed hole; the very taste of the big apple in her hand; the soft clasp around her neck of a dear little sister's arm; and even the slow, swinging motion with which they both swayed softly to and fro, as careless children will, keeping uncon-

scious time to some sweet, unknown tune. Penny and Lally! Yes, those were their names! Their dead mother's poetical fancy, their father's care to give them their names in full, their slightly dignified position as Elder's daughters, could not save them from the shearing and clipping tendencies of school familiarity and daily use. *Penserosa* and *Allegra* were written in their Bibles, and worked by their own patient fingers on their "samplers;" but, to the Bee-bury world and to each other, they were only "Penny" and "Lally;" not heroines nor cherubs, but good, quiet, little girls, whom Samanthly dressed in blue-checked gingham frocks in summer, and brown woollen in winter, and in long-sleeved, high-necked calico "tiers" or aprons, all the year round. The fact of their being twins and motherless had given them a little distinction at first; but other mothers dying, and other twins being born,—and the Elder showing no disposition whatever to "change his condition,"—they soon ceased to be objects

of special interest. Even their names were not wondered at, long ; for, however severe, conventional, and innovation-fearing New England country people may be in most respects, in the matter of naming their children they show a degree of invention, imagination, and sensationalism comically inconsistent.

Penserosa and Allegra Mason had no reason to feel shy or sensitive about their names, when in the same spelling-class stood Clarissa Harlowe Flanders, Ariadne Jackson, Sardeny Wilhelmine (always pronounced William-ine) Burton, Lamartine Locke, Jerome Erastus Parker, and Ephraim Virgil Napoleon Bonaparte Grimes.

The teacher's name was Emma Isadora Green ; and one of the neighbors, having prosaically called her first two sons William and Joseph, pined for novelty, opened a history of the United States at random, and called her third "Baron Steuben" (invariably pronounced Bay-ron).

Nor was the Scripture element wanting, for there were three Ruths ; though, I am sorry to

say, in the zeal for double names, they were respectively called Ruth Ellen, Maria Ruth, and Ruth Esther: there was one Bathsheba, called "Bashy" for short; plenty of Nathanaels, Samuels, and Ebenezer's; one Salome (too often abbreviated to "S'lome"); while another unfortunate was actually called Ai,—his parents thinking that any thing out of the Bible must be right, and quite unaware that they had chosen the name of a city.

Neither were my two girls remarkable for beauty: though Penny's brown eyes were large and expressive, and Lally had beautiful bronze-colored curls; yet, as Samanthy herself said, the former was "too pick-ed featur'd," and the other "too chunked." Moreover, both had that fair, delicate complexion which is, in childhood, a prey to innumerable fine freckles. Two distinctions, however, they certainly had; their voices were sweet, low, and refined, quite unlike the majority of their mates, and they studied Latin. This last—a thing utterly undreamed-of for girls in

that vicinity—they owed, of course, to their father, who, leaving them wholly to Samantha's care in all else, gave them regular instruction in his favorite language, in matters religious and theological, and in love of their lost mother. So closely were these last topics associated in their infant minds, that poor little Lally once paralyzed the whole Sabbath school, when asked to explain the last line of the doxology, by saying she supposed it meant "God and Jesus, and dear mamma."

"Hiram," said Lally, one of those stormy afternoons, — "Hiram, what *is davenportes*?"

"Now Lally," he replied, shaking his head reproachfully, "I allus knew you was a beater for questions, but I *didn't* think you'd make up words, and then ask a feller what they meant."

"But it *is* a really word," persisted the child: "don't you know you told us about the life and davenportes of Robin Hood, 'cause we helped husk the corn?"

"O—h, sartin, sartin, child; but it's *adventurs*, the life an' adventurs," very slowly.

"Well, what does it mean, Hiram?"

"Why it's when — when somethin' wonderfle happens to a person — somethin' out o' the common, you know, like 'most gettin' drownded, or meetin' a tiger, or — or fallin' into a well."

The children reflected a while in silence.

"People don't have daventures in Beebury, do they?" Lally asked at length, forgetting the proper pronunciation in her earnestness.

"Wal, no, not every day," said Hiram, with a funny look in his eyes. "Beebury's a kind of a steady, right-along, go-to-meetin' sort of a place, you see."

"Do they have them in Virginia?" asked Penserosa, whose thoughts ran much upon her mother.

"That's more'n I c'n say," returned Hiram: "I hain't bin no great of a traveller; but ef we could foller this here shoe I'm a-makin', we'd have lots on 'em, Lally; for it's a-goin' right down to Virginny — like's not where your mother useter live."

"O Hiram!" cried both children, gazing with big eyes from the half-finished shoe, to its mates already neatly packed in a clean, pine box; "really and truly?"

"Sartin sure they be: why, didn't you know them was all plarntation shoes, for the poor toilin' nigger slaves?"

They shook their heads, and impulsive little Lally's eyes filled with tears. She had heard of slavery often,—had learned Jane Taylor's hymn,—

"I was not born a little slave,
To labor in the sun,
To wish that I were in my grave,
And all my labor done," &c. ;

but this somehow seemed to make it more real than ever before.

"Is that why they are all so large?" inquired Penny, in an awed whisper.

Hiram nodded: his mouth was full of pegs.

"Don't you ever make any for the little slave children?" she continued, fascinated by the discovery.

"Barefoot," mumbled Hiram, shaking his head. The merry fellow was sorry he had turned the talk in so depressing a direction; and, as soon as he could speak, he remarked cheerily, —

"Come to think on 't, Lally, *you* had an adventur' once, when you was a little teenty gal."

"*Did* I, Hiram?" joyfully, and Lally wiped away her tears: "oh, tell us all about it!"

"Wal, ye see, I was a-milkin' out 'n the barn yard, milkin' the brindle; and the Aldēny, 'she was a-standin' t'other side, and you come in the gate, 'n' sot out to come over to me; 'n' my back bein' turned, I hadn't no notion on 't, till all of a suddin I saw the Aldēny put her little, spitefule head down, an' start full tilt to'ards the gate. I mistrusted in a minnit, and gev a quick jump backwards-like, an' worn't no more'n in time to ketch you up, and drop you t'other side o' the fence. Then I jest snatched up the milkin' stool, and gev the critter a good lammin', — an' you, little forgivin' thing, stood a-cryin' outside, beggin' me not to '*hurt the poor cow!*'"

"And was that a real adventure, Hiram?" said Lally, drawing a deep breath of satisfaction.

"Sartin!" he returned.

Penny looked admiringly at her sister, and said, "Perhaps *I* shall have one, too, some day."

Slaves were effectually banished from their thoughts for the time; but, after they went to bed that night, they lay awake a long while, talking it over, and wishing they could put something into that box, to comfort the beings whom their fancy pictured perpetually beaten, bleeding, and weeping. Lally proposed pancakes and apples, but the more prudent Penny suggested that, before the box could reach Virginia, the goodies would be mouldy. A treasured picture-book was then advanced, after great mental struggle, for they owned but three between them; but it was finally decided that it would be wrong to give away any thing so valuable without leave; and their plan was to be entirely private, partly because they dearly loved a secret, and partly because they feared Samanthy and

Hiram would laugh. After two nights of conference, a letter was decided upon, composed and written as follows:—

“Dear slaves, we are both very sorry for you, and we want to send you some pancakes and books but it would mold. Goodby from Penny Mason and Lally Mason. P. S. We live very far away in beebury but Hiram maid all these shoes and we helpt.”

This epistle, neatly printed in capitals, with a lead pencil, on half a sheet of paper, was folded very small, and squeezed into one of the shoes, unsuspected by Hiram, who presently nailed up the box, and took it on a load of wood to Coneford, where it was delivered to the dealer from whom he received orders.

The mental enjoyment of the twins in this mystery, and in the thought that they had done their little best to comfort the slaves, cannot be told; but, a few weeks later, an event occurred which banished it entirely from their minds. Samanthy consented to allow Hiram to take them to the annual Fourth of July picnic, which

always included the ascent of Bald Mountain, over whose sharp shoulder the children had seen the sun set ever since they could remember.

All the young people, from both Hill and Hollow, assembled at the red school-house on the appointed morning, with most suggestive baskets, pails, and jugs. No happier faces were to be seen than those of sunburnt Hiram and his eager charges, though there were plenty of sheepish-looking "keepin'-company" couples among the party; for to pair off on the occasion of this picnic was almost equivalent to having the "marriage intentions" pasted up in the meeting-house porch.

The first seven miles were accomplished in wagons; then a deserted barn was reached, in and around which all the teams were left, and the real climb began.

Over stone walls, through rugged pastures, growing ever steeper and more rocky, stooping now and then to moisten dry throats with a

cluster of small, sweet, field-strawberries, or a hand-scooped draught from a trickling spring; now bounding aside from the apparently determined onset of some busy, blundering "bumble-bee;" now startling a mother ground-bird from her shallow nest, and tarrying for a loving look at the hideous, gaping young; sitting down gladly when the rest did, but careful to complain of nothing, lest 'Lecty Sage (last year's crabbed school-ma'am) should remark again upon the folly of having "hinderin' young ones along," — on went the twins, keeping close to Hiram, but bravely refusing his often offered hand, because he was already laden with a big basket, and the coat and shawls on which careful Samanthy had insisted. Every halt gave them the joy of looking back upon the distance already achieved; and, as one and another distant village or gleaming pond appeared, and was identified by Hiram and other wise ones, the delight of the children increased, and they squeezed each other's hands and sighe

aloud, in very inability to put into words their strong sense of the beautiful, inherited from, rather than cultivated by, their refined but silent father. At last, after two hours of hard climbing, varied by numerous falls, scratches, and bruises, they gained the bare ridge which had heretofore formed the horizon and *ultima Thule* of their simple lives. The first sensation was one of disappointment. They had pictured the top as one acute, unmistakable point, on which, perhaps, they might be held, one at a time, by Hiram, but from which a fall would be perpendicular, and of course fatal,—and here was a comparatively level place, large enough to accommodate the whole party; and, though it was wild and desolate enough, without vegetation, a wilderness of seamed and splintered ledges and lichen-rusted boulders,—still it was a great blow not to find a definite “tip-top.”

But the view! No disappointment there! That was more solemnly wide and beautiful than their wildest dreams; and, when Hiram

pointed out the blue outlines of the White Mountains, they were happy indeed, and rather sorry to be called down from their raptures to the jollity of dinner. Bounteous was the display of bread and butter, turnovers and cheese, doughnuts, frosted cake, pies, pickles, jugs of tea, coffee, and milk. There was plenty of rustic fun and gallantry too; a little speech-making and a great deal of singing after dinner; a high pile of stones was built to commemorate the day, and the beaux of the party worked hard at hammering their own and their beloveds' initials in the face of the rock. About four o'clock, the weather-wise detected unmistakable "thunder-heads" looming up in the south-west, and it was agreed to begin the descent. This proved a much more straggling affair than the ascent. Some of the young men knew a short but steeper way; some preferred the longer, easier path; the lovers wandered away on either side; some of the boys wished to find a certain cave, while others remembered a porcupine's den,

and wanted to carry home some quills, as trophies of the day.

Penny and Lally being among those eager to see the latter attraction, Hiram tried to guide them ; but, differences arising as to the exact spot, the three presently found themselves quite out of sight or hearing of the rest. This did not trouble them at all, especially as they found the den, and picked up a number of little quills around its mouth. But now the clouds became more threatening ; and, impelled by fear of Samanthy's wrath should the children get wet, Hiram proposed a run. Fatal haste ! The ground was treacherous with rolling stones, and slippery with short, sunburnt grass. Hiram, once started, could not stop. He let go his hold upon the children's hands, cried hoarsely to them to stop, to sit down ; and then, frantically catching at a bush on the edge, fell heavily over the steep side of an out-cropping ledge, and lay very still a dozen feet below. Thus Penny found him, when, having left sob-

bing Lally in a safe hollow above, she had slidden and crept down from bush to bush. His leg was broken, and he was almost insensible, though moaning faintly. Penny was only ten years old, and, until now, childish and timid for her age; but the emergency developed her fast, and, as soon as she was sure that Hiram *could* not act, she knew that she *must*. Climbing back to her sister, she said firmly, —

“Stop crying, Lally: Hiram isn’t killed, and I’m going to take you down to stay with him, while I go to find somebody.”

Lally resisted at first: she was afraid of Hiram, when he was so still; afraid of the lightning, now frequent. But Penny prevailed, and, having conducted her sister to the foot of the ledge, kissed her good-by, with these solemn words, —

“Now, Lally, you be good, and I guess God’ll take care of us. You must stay here with poor Hiram and the shawls and the basket,

and you can eat some cake if you want to, and I'll be just as quick as I possibly can."

"But how will you know the way back to us," gasped Lally, holding on to her sister's dress with both hands.

Penny had not thought of this, and now took a careful look all around, finally deciding upon a tall, lightning-blasted oak as a landmark, after which she pulled herself away, and went bravely down the mountain, through seas of fern almost as high as her head; over "dreadful scratchy places," where brush had been cut and left; through gloomy, little groves of stunted spruces; across bare stretches, silvery with "everlasting;" calling out for her party occasionally, but getting no reply; making a long circuit to avoid a swampy hollow; and, after nearly an hour of unabated speed, came out panting, flushed, brier-torn, anxious, but resolute as ever, into a broad meadow, beyond which,—oh, welcome sight!—was a large red house and a long unpainted barn. Joyfully

scrambling over a wall, she sped towards it, when, from behind a knoll, there suddenly appeared a very threatening-looking group of half-grown cattle. Country girl though she was, Penny had always been afraid of horned creatures ; and her terror now was really agonizing. To fly back to the wall was her first impulse ; but a glance showed her that to skirt that great field would involve long delay, and poor Hiram was suffering. No, she must go on ; and she must not run, or those dreadful creatures would be sure to chase her ; they were staring at her already, and one rough-coated one was shaking its head ! Terrible tales of "hooking" and "tossing" rushed through her mind ; she clinched her little hands, and sobbed aloud in her distress ; her tired feet stumbled over the grassy hummocks, but she held steadfastly on her way. The farther wall grows nearer, nearer : she must not look behind, though she fancies she hears a trampling ; and now, now she has reached the bars, and,

trembling far too much to climb over, half flings herself, half falls, upon the ground, and rolls under—safe at last—in the very doorway of the red house, among the tufts of catnip and yellow dock and budding hollyhocks that fringe its big wood-pile.

“Lawful, suz!” cried the shrill voice of a buxom woman, who was picking up chips into a rusty milk-pan; “Whad-der yer mean by scarin’ a body to death like that for?”

Penny sat up among the chips, and stared in her turn, tried twice to speak, but her throat was parched; something inside trembled strangely, and she began to cry instead, but, presently recovering herself, told her story, which was received with loudly exclamatory sympathy, by rosy-faced, kindly Mrs. Buttrick, who dragged her into the house, and made her lie down on a home-made, patch-work-covered sofa, while she seized a long tin horn, and blew a resounding blast, to “fetch the men-folks from the fur lot.” Penny’s troubles were over now; the thunder

storm passed by without a drop of rain; and, refreshed by food and kindness, it was easy to guide the hearty-voiced farmer, and his two tall sons — named Benevento and Beethoven after favorite tunes in the hymn-book, the father being leader of the choir — to the foot of the ledge where Hiram lay. They were discovered to be “kind o’ cousins” of Samanthy’s, and Beethoven insisted on carrying Penny in his arms up the steep way.

They found Lally fast asleep on and under the shawls, and Hiram patient and cheery, though in great pain.

A few hours later saw him safely in bed at his cousin’s house, under Dr. Hopkins’s care, and the children in the half-fierce, half-loving clutch of Samanthy, who had been almost frantic with anxiety and indignation when the party returned without them.

Not a word of blame did she utter, as her nervous fingers unfastened and twitched off their sadly torn, dew-soiled, and grass-greened

garments. Patiently did she listen to their eagerly outpoured accounts of the joys, the wonders, and terrors of the day; but when, as they nestled safely into their bed,—bathed, fed, comforted, and happy,—Penny said, in a low, awe-struck, but unmistakably exultant tone,—

“O Samanthy! we’ve had a *real* adventure at last, haven’t we?” She actually stooped and kissed the child, and, with a queer choke in her breath, replied,—

“I per-sume to say, you hev, you dear little creetur! An’ ef ever I forgit how you traipsed down that lonesome mounting, an’ a-past all them steers, to fetch the folks to Hiram, may wuss come to me!”

Nor did Hiram fail to appreciate what the child had dared and done for him. From the moment when he saw her returning through the dewy twilight with the help she had sought, his strong heart went out to her with an affection which was to deepen and color his whole life.

The thought of her was henceforth to be associated with all his good resolutions, all his plans for self-improvement, all his conceptions of the pure and beautiful.

CHAPTER VI.

"That saints will aid, if men will call,
For the blue sky bends over all."

COLERIDGE.

"**M**ORNIN', S'manthy; mornin', gals; don't some on ye want to go a-plummin' to-day? My Sophrony she was a-goin', but she's undertook some tailorin' for Mis' Deacon Sawyer's boys; an' what with losin' one day with sick headache, an' another helpin' me wash, she's so drove to-day, she can't stir outer the house, an' I hate dreff'ly to go plummin' 'lone; the mounting is such a lonesome kind uv a place, you know. Come, gals! git your sun-bonnets and pails! the rozberries is as thick as spatter, up'n the Hopkins parstur, an' you c'n git enough, 'fore dark to set you up in sass for a week! Come!"

This friendly summons came from Mrs. Silas Elliot, generally known as "Widder Si' Ellit,"

who appeared at the Elder's open back-room door, one July morning, in a limpy, green-checked gingham dress, a "log-cabin" sun-bonnet to match, and with a ten-quart tin pail on her arm. Samanthly paused in her ironing of the Elder's Sunday shirt, and seemed to reflect. In reality, she was thinking, "Ef the gals go, it'll jes' give me the chance I've bin a-wantin,' to hev a spell o' talk with their father, 'bout 'em; an' Hiram he's allus a-wishin' for rozberry sass;" but all she said was,—

"I can't go; but the gals may, ef they wanter, arter Lally's done shellin' them peas. Penny, you c'n finish that ere piller-case, arter you git back."

The girls—they were fifteen now—gladly accepted the permission to go out, for a whole day, into the sunshine and free air. It was a rare privilege; for Samanthly, having resolved from the first that "they shouldn't be no such poor, sickly, shif'less, ignorant things," as their unfortunate mother, had trained them in all manner of housewifely accomplishments, and, when they

were not in school, always found some means of keeping them usefully busy. Moreover, she did not approve of going out of doors for the purpose of mere enjoyment.

“Ef anybody’s sick, you c’n go an’ nuss ’em ; ef you’ve got an arrant at the store, you c’n go an’ do it, an’ come straight back agen ; ef you’re invited to spend the arternoon anywheres, you c’n take your knittin’ or your patchwork, ’n’ go, — but I never *did* hold to havin’ gals a stragglin’ ’round the country, like ole hen-turkeys, an’ so I tell you !”

“Plummin’,” however (as gathering any sort of berry was invariably called in Beebury), was a legitimate summer occupation ; and a long, happy day our girls had, dyeing their fingers, and filling their measures with the abundant fruit ; half listening to the “Widder Ellit’s” prattling talk, half lost in their own girlish dreams, and careless enjoyment of the summer day. Late in the afternoon, when their large pail and birch-bark pints were all filled, the widow bade

them, "Sed down 'side o' that big rock, an' rest, till I jest fill my quart onst more, an' then we'll be a travellin.'"

They were near the top of Hemlock Hill ; a broad and pleasant view lay before them, leading them, as wide prospects so often do, to thoughts of the future, — of what they should do, or be.

"Penny," exclaimed Lally, after a long, silent outlook upon the quiet, little village far below, "do you think we shall live here always, just going to school, and helping Samanthy, and going to church and sewing-circle, and no fun but a picnic now and then, or the county fair ? Don't you suppose we shall ever go away, or have any thing happen ?"

Penny laughed. "You're as fond of 'daventures' as ever, Lally ; perhaps you'd like to break *your* leg *this* time ! I suppose Mrs. Elliot and I could get you home after a fashion ; but we should have to leave all these raspberries, and that would be a pity. You know you love jam, and so does Hiram."

"Don't laugh at me, Pen!" cried the girl, with sudden earnestness. "I tell you, I sometimes feel half wild with a longing to see more, and do more, and get out of our every-day-alike way of living! Father is a dear, and I'm very proud of him, but you know he hardly ever talks to us; and Hiram's kind, but not much of a companion; and Samantha's as good as gold, but oh, so different from what mother must have been! and, I know it's wicked, but I *do* so want a change!"

"O Lally!" and her sister grew grave in her turn, "what if it should be a sad change! Don't talk so! We know things can't go on forever in the same way; but how much worse than dullness it would be, if Samantha should be sick, or Hiram go to California, as one of the Buttrick boys did, or father should — should," her voice fell to a whisper, "be taken away as mother was."

"Hush, hush!" cried Lally, clutching her sister's hand, "you know I didn't mean to be ungrateful, but honestly, Pen, wouldn't it be

nice to travel? to go to a city—or to visit somebody we've never, never seen!"

"You're thinking of that story, Lally: that's what has upset you."

They had both been reading Miss Austen's "Northanger Abbey," a copy of which was among their mother's possessions, with "Maria Beall Dudley, from her dear sister Virginia," on the yellow fly-leaf.

"Yes, it would be very nice to travel—oh! here comes Mrs. Elliot, and we mustn't go spilling our berries in our excitement, like the foolish milkmaid, for a scolding from Samanthy isn't the sort of adventure we want."

"All the same," muttered Lally, wilfully: "I wish something would happen."

Meanwhile, Samanthy, having finished her afternoon work, put on a clean, calico dress, armed herself with her knitting, and knocked at the Elder's study door.

"Ef you ain't too busy, sir, I'd like to free my mind a spell 'bout the childun."

"Certainly, certainly, Samantha," said the Elder, admitting her. "You do not perceive any symptoms of illness about them, I trust," he added anxiously, with a dim recollection of scarlet-fever, which had prevailed in town some six months before.

"O Lor', no ! but I've bin a-thinkin' whether or no 'twouldn't be a good plan to give 'em a year or so to the 'Cademy. You see, Elder, they 're goin' on sixteen, an' they 're good, stiddy gals, that 'ud make good use o' their prevvylices, an' I've simmered it over an' over in my mind a consid'able while, an' I've come to the conclusion that seein' as how they 're Elder's darters, an' Deacon Sawyer's goin' to send his'n, an' seein' that our gals hain't never bin out o' Bee-bury, nor had no mother to kinder polish up their manners, I b'lieve it's what *she* 'd a-liked 'em to do."

This pronoun, strongly emphasized, and accompanied by a sharp sniff—Samanthy's usual equivalent for a sigh—was well understood by

the Elder to refer to his wife, and he was both touched and convinced by the argument. After a prolonged silence, he replied, —

“I will consider your suggestion, Samantha: you have been most faithful to my little girls, and I have much respect for your judgment. I suppose you had reference to the Academy at East Greenville?”

“Yes, sir; that ain’t so fur off but what they could come home for a Sarbbath now an’ then, on the stage; an’ Mr. Coffin he’s a friend o’ your’n, an’ a real smart scholar; an’ Mis’ Coffin’s the right kind of a woman, an’ real pooty-mannered too. Ez to the expense, Elder, I guess I c’n turn to an’ make butter’n’ cheese enough to make out the diff’runce. It’ll be kinder lonesome without the gals, an’ I shall be glad of a little more bizness, you know.”

With this highly ingenious bit of deception, Samanthy rose, and abruptly retired to the kitchen, winking and sniffing suspiciously.

The next morning the Elder drove to East

Greenville, and, on his return in the evening, announced to his daughters that they must be in readiness to enter Maple-Grove Academy at the beginning of the Autumn term. Their surprise and delight were characteristically shown. Penny flushed deeply, and tears filled her eyes; while Lally flung her arms around her grave father's neck, and thanked him eagerly.

Samanthy received the news philosophically, and had an errand at Mrs. Sawyer's that very afternoon. Hiram alone was dismayed, and went about his work for several days after, with such a disconsolate air, that his sister took him sharply to task, telling him that he "looked ez womble-cropped ez a çow without horns, an' they're the meanest-lookin' critters goin'."

She kept the girls very busy, sewing on their outfit, which was quite elegant in their eyes; and no European tour was ever anticipated with more rosy imaginings, than was this twenty-mile journey and year's absence, by our simple maidens.

"Did *you* ever go to an Academy, Samantha?" asked Lally one day.

"Wal, I did, an' I didn't," was the reply. "You see, I sot out to go, when I was bout 's old 's you be, an' Reuben he — that 's my oldest brother — was a-goin' too. We was pooty poor, an' hed to live in a dreffle narrer-contracted way for a long time, to git the money for clo'es an' so on, but we got it at the long last, an' begun the term as pleased as could be, you'd better believe. We didn't go boardin' in a stylish way to the Principle's house, as you're a-goin' to; but Reuben he laid out to sleep with a boy that lived near the 'Cademy, an' he was a-goin' to take care o' the school-rooms, build the fires, an' sweep, you know, to pay for his teachin'; an' I had an attic room, an' paid for it, doing chores; and we found our own pervishuns, with what mother could send us by the stage onst a week. Wal, we made out toll'able well for 'bout two months, an' was gittin' quite a notion of the lessons, when, all of a suddin, father he

clapped-to an' died! He'd bin poorly, off 'n' on, for more 'n a year, but still we warn't no ways perpared for *that*; an' mother she sorter gev right up, an' I hed ter go home an' nuss her, an' see ter things; an' Reuben he hed ter go, too, to take care o' the farm, an' that was the last o' the 'Cademy *we* hed. O' course, we'd *ruther* hev kep' on, but everybody can't hev their '*d ruthers*'; an' when a fam'ly breakin'-up comes, why, there you be, an' you've got to do the best you can about it."

Samanthy sniffed vigorously, and suddenly added, "Pensyrosy Mason! You're a-bastin' that 'ere sleeve in hind-side-afore, so we'll jest quit talkin'."

CHAPTER VII.

“As high as we have mounted in delight,
In our dejection do we sink as low.”

WORDSWORTH.

TWO more years passed, busy and almost cloudless for our girls. Penny dearly loved study, and was happy anywhere with her sister. Lally keenly enjoyed the stir and excitement of a large school of boys and girls, of a better class than she had hitherto met, to say nothing of the indisputable belleshism to which she soon attained among them. For the Elder, Samanthi, and Hiram, the months went more slowly and monotonously than ever; but hard work, and brave, unselfish hearts carried them along. Unspeakable was their pride and happiness when the girls came home from time to time; entire their unconsciousness of the fact (bravely fought against by the sisters) that

at every vacation, home seemed to them smaller and more homely, Father more quaint and queer, Samantha more grotesque, Hiram more sheepish and rustic. At last came the crowning pride and bustle, the long-dreaded partings of Graduation Day, which the Elder attended in his least rusty black suit, Samantha in a new scarlet and green plaid poplin, and Hiram in his first tall hat. Then Penserosa and Allegra came home "for good;" tall, sweet-looking, gentle-mannered girls of eighteen, each with an ornamental printed diploma a foot square, a well-filled autograph album, many promises to "write often" from school cronies, a secret shrinking from the homely quietude of Beebury, and a fervent resolve to make the best of it.

Shrewdly anticipating that time would at first hang heavily upon their hands, Samantha had "blocked out" a set of shirts to be made for the Elder, and a gay patch-work quilt, all of "spandy new caliker stars," for the best-room bed; but profane Lally scoffed at these homely diversions.

“Why should I prick my fingers rough with patch-work for our best room, when nobody ever stays in it but snuffy old ministers and missionary agents?” she demanded of her sister. “Put down that wrist-band, Pen, and let’s go over to the Hollow and take tea with Mrs. Flanders and Clary, and have Hiram come for us with the wagon after milking; then he’ll take us a little ride, if *you* ask him; he’d take us to Coneford, I believe, if ’twould please you. Come!”

When winter set in, with its howling storms, and snow-blockaded roads, poor Lally was more restless than ever. One day in December, when they had been storm-bound for four days, she amused herself by trying all sorts of new dishes “out of the cookery-book,” till Samanthly drove her from the kitchen. Then she flung herself down beside her tranquil sister, and took up the despised sewing in a fit of despairing penitence. “We are just like our two samplers on the wall there, Pen!” she remarked presently, — “*finished*

and framed, and hung up in the parlor to fade !
Those roses were pink when we worked them, but they're dull and pale now, and by and by they'll be only yellowish white ; but they'll hang there still, and Samanthy'll clean the glasses once a year, and keep on admiring them as long as she lives ! And it will be just so with us : we shall get paler, and yellower, and dryer, year after year, and nothing will happen ; and we shall be called 'the old-maid Masons ;' but Hiram will still worship you — no, I *won't* hush, Penny,— and father will keep on calling us 'children,' and Samanthy will tutor us to the end of the chapter ! ”

“ Lally dear,” said Pen, after a hearty laugh at this picture, “ you don't feel like sewing ; get a book, and read aloud a while.”

“ But I'm sick of every book in the house. I believe I could say 'Northanger Abbey' by heart, and I'm sure I don't want to read 'Bennett's Letters to a Young Lady,' or 'Father Clement,' or 'Coelebs in Search of a Wife,' or 'The Mother's

Assistant,' any more! Why don't we take the 'Atlantic,' as Mrs. Coffin does, or 'Harper's Magazine'?"

"I don't suppose we can afford it; you know father only has four hundred dollars a year: but, oh! I wish we could earn something ourselves, and take one! How beautiful it would be to have it coming once a month!" Her brown eyes flashed eagerly. "Lally, I wonder if I couldn't keep school!"

"You never shall," cried her sister, hugging her: "I can't spare you, and you would grow prim and vinegar-faced, and you couldn't keep order with your sweet little voice; the boys would scare you to death, and I shouldn't know you when you came home."

After this incoherent remonstrance, Lally pulled away her sister's work, having cast aside her own some time before, and dragged her to the window, to see if the clouds were not breaking away. "There's Hiram back from the store!" she presently cried, "let's come out in the barn

and consult him ! Perhaps we could pick berries next summer, and he would sell them in Coneford for us." And away she went, through kitchen and shed, into the barn ; Penny lingering to close the doors which her headlong sister left swinging, in spite of Samantha's "jumping tooth-ache." Hiram was quite fired by the plan ; for, though not scholarly enough to enjoy books by himself, he dearly loved to hear the girls read aloud, and would listen for hours, with unflagging interest.

"Pickin' an' sellin' berries ain't no use," he said : "there's too many in the bizness a'ready, an' I don't wanter see them hands all sunburnt-up ; but ef you've a mind ter hire the Widder Green's childun to pick 'em, an' you make 'em inter jam, I guess I c'n sell *that*, in Coneford, to some o' the hotel folks, when I take down my shoes. I'm a-goin, with a load o' wood, next week, an' I'll see ef I can't start a bargain."

"O Hiram, that's *very* good of you !" cried Pen, in her sweet, fervent way : "if you only *will* help us, we'll read to you and Samantha every evening !"

Her cheeks glowed, her eyes beamed gratefully on him. Hiram's heart beat faster, and he inwardly resolved that, if the money couldn't be made in jam, it should in shoes; but he only responded, —

"That's all right, Penny; now you run in to the fire, or your little nose'll be froze clean off. Lally! Stop a-stuffin' that 'ere hoss with oats! you'll git him so lively he'll stomp his stall down! Run in, I say, and tell Samantha I'm starvin' for my supper."

When Hiram next went to Coneford, he took, in addition to his usual load, four jars of raspberry jam, which Samantha and the girls agreed they could spare from last summer's store, "an' not scrimp your father, nor Hiram neither."

"*We* can eat cider-apple sauce," said Penny.

"And what is good enough for us is good enough for agents and colporteurs," added saucy Lally.

It was late when Hiram returned, but the girls were sitting up wide awake, while Sa-

manthy was snoring over her knitting, and a good supper was keeping hot on the hearth. He reported the sale of the jam for two dollars, and the agreement to take two dozen more jars next season. "So there's your magazine money," he added, throwing down a five-dollar bill; "an' now I'm in a hurry for my supper."

"Oh, how good of him to pay in advance; and how kind of you to see about it!" cried the girls, unsuspectingly.

Samanthy looked at Hiram, who was a little red, but she said nothing; and then the question came up which magazine should be subscribed for, and how the letter should be worded. Thence ensued some of the happiest hours of their lives. The monthly arrival of the magazine was looked for as eagerly, hailed as joyfully, as was ever mail steamer by a foreign colony. Every evening, between milking-time and ten-o'clock prayers, as long as it lasted, Penny and Lally read aloud in turn, while Samanthy knitted, and Hiram, with jack-knife

and sand-paper, fashioned a cream-skimmer or a spoon from a bit of birch or maple. Occasionally, the Elder would join the little circle ; but more frequently he was shut up, as of old, in his study. And the winter wore away ; the short days filled with housework and sewing, the evenings brightened by the magazine and neighborly calls ; and though impatient Lally, inheriting all her mother's dislike of cold and snow, often declared that the drifts never would melt, the earth never reappear, much less be green again, yet leaves and flowers came at last, and with them a great surprise,—a letter for the Elder from his dead wife's sister, the "Aunt Virginia," whose carefully sloped and shaded handwriting the girls had often studied on the fly-leaf of "Northanger Abbey." It was dated "Norfolk, Va.," and ran thus:—

"MY DEAR BROTHER,—In spite of the *long* interval of years, so charged with *changes* and *sorrows* for us *both*, I venture to believe that we are *still* friends, and that I may *confidently* look to you for assistance

in a matter I will presently mention. You may remember that, soon after your union with our *beloved Maria*, you received the announcement of my marriage to Dr. Arundel Lee, of this city. Our union proved a *most happy* one, and only terminated a few months ago, my honored husband being taken from me in February last, after *two years* of *patiently borne* suffering and disease. When the first *bewildering* shock of separation was over, I woke to find myself a *lonely widow*, with a very moderate income, an *only* son, brought up in expensive habits and tastes, and now twenty years old, and soon to graduate from ——— College, in this State. My nerves and general health are *greatly shattered* by long attendance on my dear husband, while his greater *age* and *force* of character have so shielded me from *all* care and responsibility, that, in matters of business, I am helpless and ignorant *as a child*. As dear Clayton desires to finish his college course, and then study law in ———, and my physician prescribes for me *complete* change and *northern* air for a few months, it has occurred to me that *you* might advise me of some *quiet, healthy* spot near you, where I could recuperate my energies, live *economically*, and cultivate the acquaintance of *dear Maria's* child, who, I *trust*, has been spared to be a comfort to your *declining* years. If you know of a quiet, respectable family, without *small* children, who could accommodate me with a *sunny, airy* room on the *second* floor, and furnish good

country fare, at not *more* than six dollars a week, I should be glad to come by the *tenth* of June. What a *sad pleasure* it will be to recall the *happy Past* with you !

“With a kiss to the dear child, believe me,

“Affectionately your sister,

“VIRGINIA DUDLEY LEE.”

Profound and various were the emotions excited by this letter. The Elder, shaken and confused by so unexpected a lifting of the curtain of his past youth, came out of his study looking quite pale, gave the letter to Penny, saying, “Here, *Maria*, read it to the rest, and decide what is our duty;” then, taking his umbrella, though it was a perfectly clear day, he followed the hill path to the upper pastures, where he was wont to meditate, leaving his half-written sermon in the middle of the sentence,—“And still more emphatically true is it, my brethren, that”—and never, to his dying day, could he remember what he had intended to write next.

Penny read the letter to Samantha as well as she could, when Lally was hanging on her

shoulder, interrupting her with laughter and tears, with exclamations and questions, and her own hands were trembling with excitement, and her breath coming fast with the half yearning for, half shrinking from, this new relative.

“Lonely widder, indeed!” sniffed Samantha, when the girls had carried the letter away, to be talked over, and re-read by themselves, in their favorite confabbing place, the broad stone step of the door opening into the apple-orchard. “A designin’, underminin’ thing! ‘Shattered narves,’ has she? *I’ll shatter her, ef she tries any of her tricks on our blessed Elder! She a helpless ignorant child! No, you don’t, ma’am! Not while Samantha Ann Jackman knows what’s what! You may come, for I s’pose that’ll be the eend on’t, but you don’t play off no step-motherin’ on my gals, and so I tell you! ‘Dear Maria’s child,’ indeed! when it’s plain to be seen she’d forgot ’twas twins, an’ even wasn’t sartin whether ’twas boy or gal! An’ who’s gev her a right to talk ’bout ‘declinin’ years’ to him, I*

wonder! It's my belief she's older 'n he is, by a consid'able! Howsomedever, we shall see what we *shall* see; an' ef I've bin able to protect the fam'ly for 'most eighteen year from all the widders an' ol' maids in our perrish an' the next, I cal'late I c'n stan' one summer of this Virginny sister too!" •

Meanwhile the sisters, quite unaware of their father's pain or Samantha's jealous fears, indulged in the happiest anticipations; wondered if they should call her "Aunt Virginia," or "Aunt Lee;" longed to have her tell them all about their mother's girlhood; laughed in fancying her surprise at finding "two of us;" timidly speculated as to what their cousin Clayton might be like, and whether they should ever see him. At last they ran up to inspect the spare room in the light of this new discovery; threw open its windows and blinds, to see if it might be called "airy and sunny," thereby dislodging scores of half-torpid wasps; and agreeing that here, at last, was an undeniable occasion for get-

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ting out the best pink satin pin-cushion, the white-knotted fringed curtains and table-covers, which Samanthy *would* keep laid away, and a sufficient motive for finishing the long-neglected "star" bed-quilt. A cordial invitation to his "esteemed sister" to "make her home with us," if she could be "comfortable with our somewhat primitive habits," was despatched a few days after; and by the middle of June the long-looked-for lady actually arrived. Hiram was detailed to meet her at the nearest railroad station, ten miles from Beebury, the Elder being unavoidably engaged at a funeral that afternoon; and, for at least an hour before he could possibly return, the twins kept up what Samanthy, knitting on the front door-step, called "an everlastin' canter-goin'," from the east attic window, which commanded a view of the road, to the freshly-arranged spare room and the generously-spread tea-table, and then back again. From Samanthy's descriptions of their mother, and their father's hazy recollections of this sister, their

imaginations, further aided by her letter, had constructed a tall, slender Aunt Virginia, pale and worn with watching and weeping; tremulous in voice, tearful, clad in flowing black robes, and of a mildly melancholy temper. Samantha, on the contrary, expected to see, and was prepared to resist, a meddling, suspicious, fault-finding person, whose constant purpose would be to dethrone her, ridicule Hiram, oppress the girls, and marry the Elder. Aunt Virginia disappointed all these expectations from the first moment, when she appeared to their astonished eyes, dressed in a fresh, pretty buff linen suit, which as completely covered her black dress, as did her stylishly-twisted blue veil, her bonnet. She was small; she was plump; she was smiling and rosy: and there she sat beside Hiram, chatting as if they were old friends, and making benevolent efforts, with her short arms, to screen his red bronzed face from the sun with her own pretty lace-trimmed parasol. Samantha fled; but the girls, polite though perplexed, brave

though bewildered, advanced, and stammered out their little welcoming speeches, in return for the close claspings, the eager kisses, and sweet, flattering words of the new aunt.

“ *Such* a surprise! *Two* such *dear* girls! How *could* I have been so stupid? And your name, you *darling*? Penserosa? Oh, *how* like dear, romantic Maria! Then *this* sweet child is Allegra, of course. I *must* kiss that fresh cheek again! but really, *really*, I am *too* dusty to touch anybody! And there is that *kind* young man actually carrying my *great* trunk all alone. Oh, you will break your back, *indeed* you will! What *is* his name? Oh, Mr. Hiram! Why he’s gone! *So* obstinate, but *so* kind! Now tell me quick, dear, what shall I pay him for bringing me over, and all?”

“Pay!” cried Lally, “Why he is Samantha’s brother! He lives here; he is one of the family; he would be offended!”

“And who is Samantha? And which is my room, you dear, little, excitable thing?” And,

with an arm round each niece, Aunt Virginia went happily prattling in. Within an hour, she had won their hearts forever, with her really sweet, happy temper; her funny little affectations of ignorance, perplexity, and fatigue; her pretty dresses and trinkets; her nice, refined ways; her voluble and flattering, but sincere love for them; her willingness to talk indefinitely about their mother, and old times, and the charms of the South. What a strange, happy sensation it was, to have this new aunt to pet and praise them, and to be petted and waited on, in turn, though never exacting or selfish! The girls were in a hazy rapture. The days were dull no more.

They took their pretty aunty to walk, and to drive, and to see the neighbors; they decorated her room, and kept it clean too, with loving care. They spent hours in remodelling their wardrobe under her tasteful supervision, and aided by many a gift from her stores; they told her all their past adventures, all their fancies

and plans. Their father and Hiram, seeing them so happy, gave in their allegiance too ; and even Samanthy, finding herself always deferred to, never interfered with, but often and honestly admired for her "extraordinary capability and neatness," and her "touching devotion to these dear girls," yielded at last, and was heard administering a decided snub to 'Lecty Sage, who stigmatized poor Aunt Virginia, on the strength of one brief interview "betwixt meetin's a-Sunday," as "too much fuss an' feathers." "An' that's all *you* know 'bout it, 'Lecty," she said, "you onny show your shaller judgement. She's one o' the right kind, an' so I tell you ! an' I'd orter know by this time. For all as pooty an' soft-handed as she looks, she ain't a bit too proud to wipe up dishes, an' set the table, an' shell peas, an' sweep a floor, an' do it well too ! T'other day, when Hiram he was a-goin' to take me over to Greenville, she took hold, an' ripped up and trimmed over my ol' bunnit, and tied his neck-han'kercher's neat 's you please ; so don't

let me hear no more o' them spitefule remarks o' yourn, if you know what 's good for yourself."

This was undoubtedly the happiest season the girls had ever known, and its culminating hour was when "Cousin Clayton" arrived, to spend part of September, and take his mother home. Of course they had long been as familiar with his looks and many virtues, as a dozen different daguerreotypes and photographs, and a fond mother's praises, could make them; but all these could not save both from falling into seemingly hopeless deeps of shyness, when he first stood before them, tall, slight, graceful, easy, — with his mother's sweet, flattering voice, but his own half-bold, half-coaxing eyes; with the first soft, un-work-hardened hands they had ever seen on a man, and in such a stylish and picturesque travelling costume as drove the youth of Beebury half-mad with rage and envy.

Alas for our innocent, impulsive, change-craving Allegra! Her woman-heart began to stir in a new way, at his first admiring glance; its de

fences wavered sadly when he and she sang together, and discovered how well their voices accorded, sitting with only Pen, one moonlight night, in the favorite orchard-door; and, he, all unknowing and uncaring, rode in conqueror of that ill-kept maiden fortress, the first time (ah, not the last!) when he claimed—as a cousinly of-course—a long, sweet, good-night kiss, at the gate, coming home from the “sing” at the school-house, which was one of the few evening dissipations known to Beebury youth. Foolish Lally never stopped to wonder why he let Hiram and Penny get so far a-head when he took his cousinly good-night, or why her sister was never asked for the same. And more foolish Samantha! once so fearful of the mother’s designs upon the Elder, and now all unsuspecting of the dangers threatening the weaker and more precious lamb of the flock. What protected Penserosa from the slightest feeling of tender interest in her handsome cousin? Was it the secretly-treasured remembrance of certain looks and

words of grave John Stedman, the assistant-teacher at East Greenville, during her happy school-years? Or was it because, with the keen intuition of twin's-love, she saw whither Lally's heart was tending? The Elder was too much absorbed in his studies and parish work to notice any thing; Samantha regarded the girls as mere children still, and was too busy with her enlarged household cares to have any thoughts beyond providing such meals as should do credit to the family, and such clothing for the twins as should prevent their city relatives from being ashamed of them. The faithful woman mixed and baked, swept, scoured, washed, and ironed indefatigably, through those autumn weeks; refusing all aid from her charges, and insisting that "not a stroke o' work should they do till the folks was gone." Hiram had more opportunities for observing the young people, for they insisted on helping (?) him in field and barn, riding home on loads of barley and brake-bedding, and even of wood; picking apples, and going for the "grist," and

wiling him away to be their guide up Bald Mountain. He had many thoughts, but he kept them to himself, and so did Mrs. Lee, whose views may have been inferred from her parting words: "I shall depend on a good long visit from you both, my darlings, by-and-by, for I shall be dreadfully lonely *after Clayton goes away for the winter.*" As for handsome Clayton, he kissed both his cousins good-by frankly and heartily, and only Hiram noticed that Penny looked surprised and grew rosy, while Lally was still and pale. "Mind and write to a fellow often," he gayly added, as he stepped into the old wagon after his mother. Hiram gave the reins a sharp jerk, and away they went,—the girls remaining at the gate to watch them out of sight, while the Elder and Samanthy went in, doubtless feeling a great sense of relief that the visit was over.

Not so the girls: they felt bereaved and sorrowful. "Come, dear," said Pen, at last, putting her arm around her sister, "we must go in: it is

really cold to-day,—the summer is fairly over.” For once, Lally was silent. Her lips trembled, and she turned obediently, but without reply. With one accord, they went into their aunt’s room, but lately so full of her cheery presence, and now so empty and still ; a sudden draught from the closing door brought down a shower of dry yellow leaves from the vine which Clayton and Lally had carefully trained over the window, and, as they fell upon the deserted bed, and slid along the floor with a sad, sighing sound, poor Lally flung herself down among the pillows, exclaiming, “ Oh yes, Pen ! the summer is gone indeed,” and sobbed and cried like a child.

CHAPTER VIII.

"But each day brings its petty dust,
Our soon-choked souls to fill,
And we forget because we must,
And not because we will."

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

THE condition of absent-minded listlessness into which Allegra began to fall, after the departure of her aunt and Clayton, was sharply and entirely broken up by the counter-irritant of serious illness in the family.

Samanthy's overtaken strength gave way, and for several weeks she lay helpless and suffering, in the horrors of typhoid fever. The girls had absolutely never seen her in bed before, so early and unflagging had been her service; and they realized for the first time, when every thing came upon them, what her labors had been.

They reproached themselves bitterly for allowing her to exhaust herself, that they might enjoy;

nor did Dr. Hopkins spare them, after he had extorted confession from his patient. "I'm free to confess, Doctor, that I've ben an' gone an' made a fool o' myself, settin' up to be tougher'n a pitch-pine knot, thro' hayin', an' dog-days, an' all! Sewin' o' nights too! I s'pose I'd orter a-let the gals go down cellar for the butter 'n' pies, 'n' things to lay the table, when I wuz all het-up with ironin', or bakin' in the brick oven; an' our cellar's jest like ice, the hottest day,—but there! I kinder hated to call on 'em, when they wuz havin' a good time with their mother's folks, an' now here I be! Pride's got a fall! an' I've got to stan' it the best I can, bein' waited on by them childun, an' listenin' to that shif'less Widder Elli't, scufflin' an' putterin' round in *my* kitchen." Poor Samantha tossed feverishly on her pillow, and tried to follow, by listening, what was going on in her beloved domains below, until delirium came, and led her weary mind away, into vast and unknown halls, to whose mysteries her unceasing voice, now childish an'

happy, now terrified and distressed, was the only clew.

The whole of October and half of November were gone before the hope of the faithful woman's recovery was assured. Long, sad, and very busy, were the weeks to our girls, so inexperienced in care and sickness ; although the neighbors were kind, the Doctor devoted, and Hiram perfectly untiring in his devices and efforts to lighten their labors and add to their comfort.

"I don't believe we ever really knew what Thanksgiving meant before," sighed Lally, as she took the last pie out of the brick oven, the day before that favorite New England feast, and set it to cool on top of the long meal-chest in the back-room. "I'm sure *I've* never been so thankful as I am this year. Isn't that a show, Pen? Six mince, eight pumpkin, five apple, and two cranberry, besides that great jar of mince-meat! And every bit our ownty-donty work! How much nicer it is than when Mrs. Elliot was

here! Now that Samantha is gaining so, and we can consult her, I don't mind the work much: do you, Pen? To be sure, the soles of my feet *do* ache like toothache, standing so long; but who cares for that, when dear old Samantha is coming downstairs to-morrow?"

"And we've got two magazines saved up to read, now that she'll be here to listen again; and we sha'n't be too tired to keep awake after dark," responded Pen, heartily.

At this moment, Hiram, who had been to "the store," was heard stamping the snow from his feet on the steps. Lally, forgetting fatigue, sprang to open the door, and exclaimed with delight when she saw his arms full of bundles, —

"O Hiram! I do believe some of those are 'donations,' aren't they? What fun it is to be a minister's family! You're always having surprises! Do let me see, quick!"

"Now, Lally Mason, hands off," cried the good fellow, as pleased as she.

"S'manthy gave me a lot of arrants at the

store, an' how do you know but that's all I've got?"

"No, no," laughed Pen, "she only sent for nutmegs, and cream-o'-tartar, and linen thread, and they are all in your pockets, I'm sure. You can't cheat us so, Hiram!"

"Dear, dear, what pesterin' critters women be!" said Hiram, holding on to his parcels, while the girls followed him about, as he vainly sought a place to put them.

"Pies all over the meal-chest—dishes on the table—cat in the rockin' chair—guess I'll go up in S'manthy's room; she ain't asleep, is she?"

"Oh, no!" and up he went, followed still by the laughing girls. They found Samantha sitting up in a big, cushioned chair, pale and thin, but cheery and crisp as ever, indulging her work-loving hands with a little stocking-mending. Hiram deposited his larger bundles on a chest-of-drawers, and, producing some little ones from his pockets, handed them to his sister, saying,—

“Here’s your arrants, S’manthy, an’ sure as you’re alive, the Deacon wouldn’t take nothin’ for ’em. ‘Seein’ it’s Thanksgivin’,’ says he, ‘an’ seein’ you’ve had sickness in the fam’ly.’ I hope to goodness the ol’ man ain’t struck with death, nor nothin’; but I come right off, soon ’s I’d thanked him, for fear he’d change his mind; an’ as I was goin’, up come Beethoven Buttrick, in his ol’ red pung, an’ called to me to wait, ’cause he’d got some things for our folks, his mother ’d sent, an’ mebbe I’d take ’em, an’ save him comin’ up the hill, the drifts was so bad. ‘It’s wild-grape jel,’ says he, ‘for S’manthy, an’ here’s a box o’ honey mebbe the gals would like.’ He kinder colored up, an’ then I saw he had his Sunday clo’es on, an’ I sorter mistrusted he wished he hadn’t met me.”

“*Sho!*” cried Samantha, with something of her old snap; “don’t talk sparkin’ nonsense to these childun yet-a-while.”

“Beethoven Buttrick, indeed!” muttered Lally, under her breath, with her little nose in the air.

Beebury swains had lost ground with her, for ever since Clayton's advent.

"It's delicious honey, though," said gentler Penserosa ; "look, Samantha ! and very kind of him, I'm sure. And this jelly is as clear as glass. What's this last bundle, Hiram ?"

"Oh ! that's three pair o' socks for your father Mis' Dr. Hopkins sent ; kind of a good-will orf'-frin', I guess, 'cause we've given the Doctor such credit by S'manthy's gettin' well. Here, Penny, I'll carry that honey down. It's too heavy for you ; and look-a-here, Lally, I'most forgot ; here's a letter I got to the office, from your aunt, I guess. That's better'n Buttrick honey : ain't it ?"

Lally received it joyfully, and, sitting on the floor, with her head resting against Samantha's knee, read the pleasant, prattling pages, once aloud, and twice to herself ; and then, being, in truth, very tired, thought she would lie down on Samantha's bed "just five minutes, and think it over," before going downstairs. She was only roused by Hiram's appearance with a tray of

supper for his sister. The room was almost dark : she started up guiltily.

“ Oh dear, I’m afraid I’ve been asleep ! Why didn’t you wake me, Samantha ? I believe you have been napping in your chair. What a selfish girl I am ! ”

She flew downstairs, rubbing her eyes, and found the pies all put away, the cooking dishes washed, the tea-table spread, the cream skimmed, wood brought in, the kettle boiling over a good fire, and the lamp lit. Penny sat leisurely in the rocking-chair, petting the cat.

“ O Pen ! ” cried Lally, “ how mean of me to let you do it all ! ”

“ Don’t reproach yourself,” laughed her sister. “ What *do* you think ? Hiram insisted I looked tired, and he just put me here, an hour ago, with the cat in my lap ; slipped Samantha’s old shawl round my waist, and tied it behind the chair, see ! and did every thing himself, just as nicely as a girl ! With your apron on too, and I laughing till the tears ran down my cheeks. Just look, Lally !

he's put on those old pie-plates, instead of the tea-plates! There are no two alike: but don't say a word to him; it might hurt his feelings."

"Hiram is as good as gold," cried Lally, looking around with much satisfaction; "but, all the same, Pen, he wouldn't have done all this for *me*, and you know it. Now do let me untie you, and then I'll call father, while you read aunty's letter."

While she was gone, Hiram came downstairs, and stood a moment at the foot, watching Pen, as she leaned back in the old black chair, smiling over the letter, and stroking Kitty with her idle hand. She looked up presently, and said, —

"Ah, Hiram! I'm untied you see: you can't tyrannize over me any more. But, really and truly, I *was* almost tired out; and now, thanks to you, I feel quite fresh again. It was very good of you to do so much."

"No great of goodness, as I see," he responded awkwardly, turning away from the sweet uplifted face, just because it was such a joy to him

to look at it. "I don't know as there's any thin' I like better than helpin' you — and Lally," he added, passing into the back-room, where he stood combing and stroking his bushy hair, before the little glass that hung over the wash-bench, until the Elder and Lally came into the kitchen, and the four sat down together to their cosy supper. Quiet, peaceful weeks followed; Aunt Virginia's frequent letters, and, now and then, one from Clayton, and the replying to these, — made pleasant interruptions in the monotony of the sisters' lives. But February brought something more interesting still, — a valentine for Lally alone (the letters were to both), of evidently original verse, and unmistakably in Clayton's writing. Such a thing had never been seen in Beebury, or even at school in East Greenville. Valentines were not unusual; but their contents had always been unblushingly chosen from the school-reader, or the "Language of Flowers," or "Friendship's Offering." Such hackneyed lines as —

“The rose is red,
The violet’s blue,
Carnation’s sweet,
And so are you,”

being not unfrequently adopted to convey a hint of the sender’s preference ; any lack of invention being atoned for by the elegant elaboration of the lace-paper on which it was written, sprinkled with plenty of gilt Cupids, bleeding or burning hearts, roses, doves, and suggestive churches and altars. But here was “real new poetry,” the sisters agreed. “And so appropriate!” cried Pen ; and “so loving,” thought blushing Lally, whom nothing would induce to show her treasure to any but her sister, though she allowed her to read it to Samanthy, when she, Lally, was not present. Comment from that keen tongue she felt she could not bear. This wonderful composition, which cost the author half an hour of scowling and scribbling, and gave poor Lally days of waking happiness, to say nothing of rosy dreams, was as follows :—

"Oft in the watches of the night,
When the world sleeps and stars are bright,
I seem to climb again the height
I climbed with you five months ago.

"Again we stand on that rough crest,
Where stormy winds can never rest,
Breathe in the air with keenest zest,
And feel our cheeks are all aglow.

"Again we spring from rock to rock,
Again defy the wind's rude shock,
Again my arm I closely lock
With yours, my bright-eyed mountain friend.

"Again in song our voices rise,
Again we walk 'neath starry skies,
And then I wake — the fancy flies !
Ah ! why must happy visions end ? "

Hardly had the first flush of this event cooled upon the innocent cheeks of our girls, when a letter from Aunt Virginia arrived, containing an urgent invitation to one of her darling nieces to spend the spring months with her. She "*could not* decide which ; *that* must depend upon their father's wishes : " but, whichever came this time, she should expect the other next year. It was

"*hard* not to *insist* upon *both now*, but that would leave the *dear old homestead* too desolate."

The generous strife that ensued may be easily imagined ; also the Elder's utter incapacity to decide such a question. Samantha argued that priority of age, however brief, ought to give Penserosa the preference ; a theory indignantly scouted by Pen herself, and eloquently supported by her sister. Hiram, divided between agony at the thought of parting from his favorite, and fear lest she should miss an honor and pleasure, gloomily proposed drawing lots. After twenty-four hours of the nearest approach to quarrelling that had ever been known in that household, the matter was decided by Doctor Hopkins. Lally had been sick for several days with a sore throat, and, though much better, was so weak and without appetite that Samantha—always fearful lest their mother's delicacy of constitution should be inherited—sent for the Doctor. He, after due questioning and examination, knit his gray eyebrows, and declared, " The amount of

it is, she never ought to have been born in New England! Perpetual warmth and sunshine, out-of-door life, and plenty of fun and change, are what you'd thrive on: hey, Miss Mirth?" Lally eagerly nodded. "I thought so. Now, Miss Melancholy here, is a born frost-flower; takes naturally to cold, and wind, and granite, and pine-trees! Never dull, or pining,—ready for work, always cheerful and contented, and law-abiding. A good sample of Puritan stock. Isn't that about so, Samanthy? The old Doctor knows a thing or two, if he *is* getting bald. Now my prescription for this humming-bird is, that she goes to make a visit to that southern aunt of hers, the first chance she gets, and the sooner the better, as far as appetite and rosy cheeks are concerned. Hallo! seems to me they're red enough all of a sudden! Sister been telling me something? No, she hasn't. Got an invitation? Good! See that you go then, and I'll take care of my pretty Pen here, never you fear."

So it was settled, and the dread of parting from her sister was now the only shadow on Allegra's happiness. The question of wardrobe had been wisely settled by Aunt Virginia in her next letter. "Don't buy or make over *any thing* in the way of dress till you come. The shops here are *far* prettier and cheaper than good *Deacon Sawyer's*, and I shall love to help you."

"Now that's where she shows her sense," declared Samanthy. "I *did* feel beat 'bout your clo'es, Lally; for, thinks—says I, how do *we* know what the style is down south; and though I don't never want you to set too much store by your outward adornin', as your father would say, still, I don't b'lieve it's nobody's duty to look redic'lus: an', more'n that, I kinder hated to rip up them best gownds o' your mother's, nor yet to let 'Lecty Sage or Sophrony Elli't tech 'em. There's three left, you know, that we 'greed las' time we opened the trunk, when you was a-fixin' to go to the 'Cademy, we'd save till you'd fairly be one growin', an' I guess the time's come now to use 'em."

She led the way to the Elder's bedroom, followed by the girls, who felt a chill come upon their happy mood, as the old hair-trunk was pulled out of the closet, where it had stood for twenty-two years,—with “M. B. D.,” in brass nails, on the arched top,—and Samantha reverently unlocked it, and disclosed the smoothly folded garments that remained of the wedding outfit of a long-ago happy little bride. “Deary-me, to think they should be a-goin’ back where they was fust made,” she ejaculated, unfolding, first a black silk, and then a pinkish purple one, with a raised, zigzag pattern, in white, on it; and lastly, a French calico, with small, bright flowers, on a buff ground. “Lor! how well I remember the fust time she ever come into meetin’ with this ‘peach-blow’ gownd; Mis’ Deacon Sawyer said flounces was *so* worldly, she wondered how your father could allow it. Many’s the time I’ve run round from mother’s to wash up the tea-things for her, when I know’d she had compny, for fear she’d spile it: she was allers so easy

and careless. Now, gals,"—coming suddenly out of her unusually pensive mood, as she saw Pen's hands tremble and Lally's eyes fill,—“now you must divide; an' my advice is, that Penny keeps the black one, 'cause she's more quiet an' womanly-like; an', Lally, you have the 'peach-blow' made over, 'cordin' to your aunt's idees, an' take this caliker to fix inter a kind of a loose mornin'-gown, with a cord an' tossle, an' skirt open in front, like the one she had here las' summer. Made that way, you could either on you wear it, bein' the same height, accordin' to which was a-visitin'.” The girls agreed, though Pen at first proposed that her sister should have all three, but this Lally indignantly refused. And now the hours fled all too fast, even for the eager young fledgling, longing to spread her wings; and, in the latter part of February, under the care of her old teacher, Mr. Coffin, who was going south with an invalid daughter, our pretty Allegra bade good-by with many tears, and set out for her mother's home.

CHAPTER IX.

"Of all tales 'tis the saddest, — and more sad
Because it makes us smile."

BYRON.

UNTIL after the stage was out of sight, Penserosa had never fairly faced the question, what life would be without her sister. What she could do to help Lally get ready, what Lally would see and enjoy, had till now filled heart and hands; and every thought of self was rigorously excluded. But now? Well, now she must not let those who loved her suspect what blackness of darkness seemed to rise before her; she must work with Samanthy, ride with her father, chat with Hiram, call on the Sawyer girls, finish that rag mat, and keep her tears and sobs till she was alone at night, and could give way freely, and, as she thought,

unsuspected, her face buried in Lally's pillow, her hands clasping Lally's picture. But panel partitions transmit sounds easily, especially to loving ears; and it was really wonderful how many times that spring Hiram had "business over to the Holler, an' thought perhaps Penny would like to go over an' see Clary Flanders," or the horse needed shoeing, and "no one could do it as well as Joe Grimes in Minkville; an' mebbe she'd feel like doin' a little shoppin' there," or he "had an arrant in Coneford, an' 'twas jes' as handy to go in the sleigh as the stage." Dr. Hopkins, too, kept his word, and often reminded his pleasant wife to send for Pen to spend an afternoon and evening, when some new book was sure to be lent which cheered the rest of the week. Nor was Samanthy blind. "Don't tell me that twins isn't different," she would often say when alone, addressing, as was her wont, some imaginary and obstinate familiar; "that child's lost a pound a week, an' nothin' but the letters keeps her

along." Happily those letters came often, and were so bubbling over with life and gossip that Pen was visibly brightened for days after their coming. "Use and wont" were her friends, too, as they are to us all; and no duty was ever unfulfilled, no matter how hard it was to miss her merry sister's help or hindrance therein. The big bundle of "Messengers" and "Well-Springs" which arrived on Fridays, was duly opened, and each copy legibly marked with its subscriber's name, that there might be no mistake in the Sunday distribution in the pews; the Elder's sermon was clearly copied; the magazine read aloud to Samanthy and Hiram; the week's mending all finished Saturday night; and her share of household work faithfully performed: but for all that, the days were weary; and though, as they passed, pain itself became a habit, and therefore endurable, she often thought,— "If I only had some entirely new work, I could bear it better." One dismal afternoon in March, she went with Hiram

to "the store," and, having bought her pins and yarn, was quietly waiting for him to finish his "trade" in the rear room, where the boots and shoes were kept, when the remarks of the half-dozen loungers around the rusty stove caught her ear. "Broke down this mornin'; had ter dismiss the scholars." "'Most fainted away, they say." "Doctor says she's in for a fever, an' no mistake." "Dretful pity! smartest teacher we've had, by a long chalk." "Who'll they git now?" "That's the question; all the likely girls 'ngaged long ago." "'Lecty's too old, I s'pose?" "Too 'tarnal cross, you'd better say! Strange neither o' the Elder's gals hain't never" — "Hush, can't ye?" and then Hiram came back, and went out to the sleigh with her. She dared not yet repeat to him what she had heard; but she lay awake long that night thinking it over. Next morning came a letter from Lally which fully decided her.

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"You can't think, Pen dear, what a difference there is about dress here. With Aunt Virginia's help, I've made my green and white plaid all over ; for, as soon as I saw other girls, I knew I could never wear it as it was ; and yet how fine we thought it when we made it last Fall ! I shall send you the pattern, so you can alter yours. And what do you think ? Aunt Virginia says that silk of poor mother's is too 'fearfully old-timey' for me to wear, and I had better have it dyed black, to wear under a black barège, which she wants me to have as soon as the warm weather comes. She isn't willing I should use it in any other way ; and, though it seems a pity that what Samanthly says mamma was so fond of shouldn't be good enough for me, yet I know *she* would want me to be guided by Aunty. Don't you think so ? I hope you won't be shocked to hear that I've spent all my money. I found I really must have a new bonnet and veil and gloves and boots and collars. Aunty has given me a real beauty of a sunshade, and I've carried it several times already ; for the weather here is like our May, and the grass is lovely and green, and there is so much English ivy on the houses and garden walls, such high box hedges and magnolia trees, all of which are green through the winter, that I can hardly believe what you tell me of your tipping over with Hiram in that big snow-drift. Do give my love to everybody. It seems a year since I saw you, and I wish every hour

that you were here. Aunt Virginia is just as kind as ever ; and the black people are so fond of me, Samantha would be afraid I should be spoiled with flattery, and being waited on, and petted. It's 'honey-sugar,' and 'pretty missy,' and 'bless your bright eyes,' and 'let me get it for you,' from morning till night. You know how dreadful it always seemed to us to have slaves ; but here it is very different, and I'm sure all of Aunt's are very happy, and altogether too lazy and childish to take care of themselves. Don't read this to Hiram or Dr. Hopkins, unless you want an explosion : they are such fierce abolitionists. You know we used to think some of the men that we heard talking politics at the Deacon's store were quite unreasonable, and got excited over the newspapers, only because Beebury was so dull, and there was nothing else to talk about ; but really, Penny, people here get quite as hot and far more bitter ; and you would almost suppose, if it wasn't too dreadful to happen, that they would like to fight against the North. And that reminds me to tell you there is a Navy Yard near here, a *very* interesting place, entirely different from any thing you ever saw ; and kept so neat, it would delight Samantha's heart, and all *by men* too, tell her. Aunt Virginia knows the Commodore's family quite well ; and we are invited to take tea there to-morrow ! Isn't that fully as delightful as any thing in 'Northanger Abbey' ? And, Pen, do you remember a picture of crocuses

Mrs. Coffin had? Well, I saw a whole bed of them in bloom the day I came here, yellow and purple and white; and, better than that, Aunty brought home from market a big bunch of may-flowers (she calls it trailing arbutus); and it fairly made me cry a little, it smelled so like home. I shall not need that *barège* for a month, so don't trouble father about the money yet." . . .

Heartily as Pen sympathized in her sister's evident happiness, her face was sober as she folded up the letter. She knew that her father could ill spare what he had already given Lally, and that he had not expected to send her any more, until her return required it. Mrs. Lee had defrayed the expenses of the journey South, saying, "as a *slight* return for your hospitality of last summer to my dear boy and myself, you *must* allow me to enclose Lalla's fare hither." Yet Pen was resolved her sister should look as nice as those "other girls." She knew how Lally would wish to compare well with them, when Clayton came home for the "Easter holidays," a new word in Beebury a year ago, but

quite familiar to our girls from their aunt's lips ; and so " I must and will take the school " was the resolve that flushed Pen's gentle face, as she knocked at Dr. Hopkins's office-door. When she came out, an hour later, her eyes were bright with hope and triumph, and in her hand was a note of recommendation to the other members of the school committee.

" What could I do, my dear ? " said the Doctor to his wife, when she reproached him, later, for " encouraging Penny Mason to take that noisy school, when she seems unusually delicate this spring, and has that wistful look in her eyes like her poor mother."

" What could I do, Persis, when she owned she was pining for Lally, and said that nothing but work and a new scene would help her ? I believe her too. Penny Mason's not made of the same stuff as her mother, if she has the same coaxing, brown eyes : she's real New England grit, and work will do her good. She's a grand girl, and, for all her quiet voice and little inno-

cent face, I'm not afraid that she will not keep the school in order. I shall watch her, though ; and I shall get Mrs. Buttrick to take her to board. She'll keep her as comfortable as Samanthy would : and Pen shall come home every Saturday and Sunday, we can trust Hiram for that. Why, Persis, those girls have never been separated before, in the whole nineteen years of their lives, not even for a day : no wonder she feels lost without Lally !”

“Does Lally feel lost too?” inquired Mrs. Hopkins, quietly picking a thread from her husband's sleeve.

“Lally? Humph, that's another matter.”

By the evening of the next day, Friday, all was settled, and Pen was to assume her new dignities on Monday. She had met with less difficulty and opposition than she had feared. The other committee-men had gladly followed the lead of their chairman ; the Elder, who had taught much in his youth, was startled by find-

ing he had a child old enough to do likewise, but remarked, "It is a noble work, my daughter, and I am glad that you feel yourself moved, and competent to enter upon it. The house will seem less bright without my little girls, but it is not for me to think of that, if they are useful elsewhere;" and stooping, with his usual gentle, far-away smile, he kissed her on her forehead. Samanthy was more surprised, and less tractable; but soon, seeing that the girl's heart was in the plan, she submitted, determining, like the Doctor, to watch, and to interfere if she saw her child looking worn. The parents in the "Buttrick deestrick" were secretly elated by their good fortune; for, although they might not have owned it, they knew that the twins were the best educated and most lady-like girls in town. Even the scholars were not sorry to be re-folded; for the snow, though still very deep, had become so disintegrated and sand-like, from many thawings and freezings, so worn into "cradle-holes" and "thank-ye-ma'ams," that "'twasn't worth a cent

for snow-ballin' nor sleighin', nor coastin' neither ; an' skatin' 's over long ago." Thus it befell Pen-serosa that the only lion in her way was the one she had least feared, — Hiram himself. When he first heard of her plans, he was roused into an earnestness and eloquence of opposition of which Pen had not supposed him capable ; but when he found that he could move her resolution by no fears of her father's loneliness, her sister's disapproval, her own inexperience, and the rough material of the school, he subsided into a gloomy silence on this, and all subjects, and, as Samantha picturesquely declared, " never opened his head without he hed ter, slighted his vittles, talked in his sleep, an' went scowlin' round about his chores, as ef he hed a grutch agin' all creation. Ef 'twas the fall of the year, I should make sure he was fixin' for a fever," she muttered one evening, as he went out to milk, " but ez it ain't, I b'lieve he's got suthin' on his mind, an' he won't tell a livin' bein', 'less 'tis our Penny. Mebbe ef he could git her by herself, he'd kinder free his mind."

"Penny," she called aloud, giving her dish-cloth a final decisive squeeze and fling, "I'll put up them custard-cups, ef you'll jest run out to the barn, and ask Hiram ef he can't scare up half-a-dozen more aigs for me before he brings in the milk: I shall want a lot for cookin' to-morrer." Pen gladly obeyed, for she had been wishing for a talk with Hiram, but, half guessing his trouble, had been too shy to make an opportunity. She knew that no one could influence him as she could, and that the barn, at milking-time, was the place where confidence and confession would be most easy. From their earliest childhood, she and Lally had sought Hiram there and then, when they had a favor to ask or a plan to suggest. So significant were their footsteps at this hour, that he would often call out before they were in sight, "No, gals, t'aint no use to-night: I reelly am too busy," or, "Yes, Lally, run and git on your best ribbins, and we'll go to the sing."

Not so now; for, well as he heard Pen's light

stepping on the wood-shed planks, long before she lifted the wooden latch of the barn-door, he did not speak or turn, though the milk hissed faster into the pail, and his brown cheeks glowed darker in the shadow. She pulled a handful of clover as she passed the mow, and stood feeding the cow he was milking, until he said, —

“Well, Penny?”

“Samanthy wants a few eggs, if you can find them.”

“All right ; enny thin’ else?”

“That’s all *she* said, but I,” breaking into school-girl phrase in her embarrassment — “O Hiram, I never thought you’d be so mean!”

In her gentleness, she repented of the hard word as soon as she had said it, and looked penitently at him, ready to take it back. To her surprise, he replied, —

“I can’t seem to help it, Penny. I know it’s mean ; but the more I think on’t, the worse ’tis. Ef ’twas enny one but *Beethoven* Buttrick, I c’stan’ it better ; but you know I allers did hate t hev him interferin’.”

Pen started back, greatly to the disappointment of the little Alderney, who stretched vainly and unheeded for the clover in her mistress's fallen hand. The girl was deeply mortified. He had not been thinking about her going, after all. It was some affair of his own.

"I don't understand you, Hiram," she said at last, in a sort of distant voice.

"Naterally not," he returned. "I didn't s'pose you would ; not bein' mean and jealous-tempered yourself, an' havin' no occasion, nor wouldn't ef you had: but you've heard of dogs in man-gers, an' may kind-of imagine how cross-grained an' cantankerous they feel. An' now you know what ails me."

She did not speak: her thoughts were whirling too near the truth now. He set his full pail away, took another, and moved his stool to the next cow before he spoke again.

"Of course I ain't enny such fool as to s'pose you'll allers stay to home; of course I know it ain't for me to speak up 'bout enny of your plans

an' doin's, nor expect you to care whether folks miss you or not; of course I know there is diff'runces an' berriers, ef 'tis a free country, an' that feelin's ain't much 'count, when there ain't no eddication; an' thet's jest where it hurts, you see. *Beethoven* he's got good notions 'bout dressin' an' behavin', an' he's fond of books, an' I'm jest mean enough, as you say, to begrutch it to him, your bein' to his house, an' he seein' you every day, an' doin' your arrants, an' bringin' your letters, an' all! *Now you know*, Penny, an' you can't despise it more'n I do myself."

A long pause, broken only by the foaming of the milk, and the soft champing of the quiet cows. Hiram kept his hot face turned away; Pen leaned against the use-smoothed, stanchion beam, twisting long spears of herd-grass into a sort of wreath, her eyes full of tears, feeling life a puzzle for the first time. How could she say enough, and not too much? At last the second pail was full, and Hiram rose silently, and took

both to go into the house, but Pen bethought herself.

“O Hiram, the eggs, you know! can’t *I* take in the pails?”

He fairly laughed aloud, and looking into her sweet, flushed face, for the first time in many days, drew his breath hard, and said gently, —

“No, you dear, little, pitiful soul! As kind an’ forgivin’ as you be, there’s some things you *can’t* do, Penny.”

“May I help hunt eggs, then?”

“Sartin’ you may, an’ welcome.” Ten minutes of climbing and scrambling followed, effectually preventing talk; but, in the tenderness of her heart, Pen let him help her up and down more than usual, and, as he held her hand to steady her on the last ladder, she said, —

“You needn’t be troubled about Beethoven Buttrick. He thinks too much of Clary Flanders; and, even if he didn’t, it wouldn’t make any difference.”

This somewhat obscure statement made

Hiram's eyes flash gratefully, but he only said, "Thank you, Penny," and gave her his hatful of eggs, while he took up the milk-pails. Samanthly gave the two a keen glance as they entered the kitchen, and remarked confidentially to her familiar, as she strained the milk, "I guess ef I leave a turnover or so round, he'll find appetite enough to eat 'em to-night."

CHAPTER X.

"They also serve, who only stand and wait." — MILTON.

LETTER FROM PEN TO LALLY.

"BEEBURY, April 7, 1861.

"DEAR LALLY, — Your letter came last night, and didn't frighten me a bit. I knew you'd be shocked at first, but if you could see how happy I am, how well the children behave, and what an appetite I have for Mrs. Buttrick's good things, you would be perfectly satisfied. I've been here three weeks now. Hiram drives over, and takes me home, every Friday night, and brings me back after second meeting, Sunday afternoon. You'll hardly believe it, but Samanthy kissed me of her own accord each time, and said I had really 'picked up' by the change. As to teaching, I was dreadfully afraid at first; but I'm sure I didn't show it, and the only one I had any real trouble with was 'P'laski' (Pulaski) Dewey, who is almost as old as I am, and twice as big. He was quite rebellious and saucy for several days, and that of course encouraged the smaller ones in mischief;

but one night, when I was locking up the school-house, he threw a hard snowball, only meaning to hit the door, and make me jump ; but it glanced and struck my chin, and made it bleed the least little bit. I sat down on the step a moment, more grieved and frightened than hurt, and he was by me at once, perfectly broken down with shame and penitence ; and we had a long talk, and both came near crying, and he's been my fast friend ever since, almost what Hiram calls 'sweet on me,' but don't tell any one I said so. All the other scholars follow his lead, and I have easy times now, and can really see that they make some progress. Next Sunday, Father's going to hold the 'early candle-light' prayer-meeting at this school-house ; so he'll drive me over, instead of Hiram, and Mrs. Buttrick has invited him to tea. O Lally, she is so kind to me ! You'd suppose I was company, and had done her the greatest favor in coming, instead of being a boarder. She says, 'For all this mounting is a consid'able sightly place, it's orfle lonesome to live here, with no houses near, and nothin' to listen to, all day long, but the lambs a-blarin' an' the crows a-cawin' up in the parsters ; an' at night there's owls a-cahootin', an' crickets and frogs, and tree-toads enough to drive a body wild. In winter it's wuss, for nothin' bigger 'n a wood-sled can go by, from Thanksgivin' till sap-time an' after, the roads is so choked up with drifts, an' ef it worn't for the cats,' (she keeps six) 'an' *him*, an' the boys

comin' home nights, I should go ravin' distracted.' And indeed, Lally, she does talk as steadily as if she should never have another chance, and pets me almost as much as Aunt Virginia and the slaves do you. I am writing at the school-house, because I can't get an hour to myself at the house without disappointing her. I am glad the money reached you safely, and that you had such a lovely time at the Navy Yard. That Commodore must be almost as stately as General Tilney; and I am sure your adventures in Norfolk are quite as interesting to read, as Catherine's at Bath and Northanger Abbey. By this time, Clayton is with you, and you are gayer than ever. What you say of the fierceness of politics at the South I can quite believe; for Mr. Buttrick and Beethoven really make my blood run cold, with their indignation over the news in the weekly paper; so different from father and Hiram. Mrs. Buttrick says 'men-folks allers *do* spout 'bout the actions down South,' and is not at all concerned, but sometimes I really fear there is trouble coming."

Before Penserosa wrote again, the war-cloud had burst, Sumter had fallen, and a tidal wave of fierce excitement flowed over the entire country. Clayton had joined the Southern army, his mother was prostrated by a nervous

fever, Beethoven Buttrick and Pulaski Dewey, and many other brave New Hampshire boys, were marching southward at Lincoln's call, and the sisters were separated, as by a line of fire.

"I could not leave Aunt Virginia now, even if you bade me, and the way was clear, and I had the money to go," Lally wrote to her father, in the only letter that reached home in many weeks. "She is completely broken down by Clayton's going into the army; can neither eat nor sleep, and is so changed I sometimes think you would not know her. She had never really believed there would be war; and, for fear of distressing her, Clayton had kept all his plans a secret, till the very last, and then the shock was too much. He came in, that terrible night of the burning of the Gosport Navy Yard, all haste and excitement, looking so eager and handsome in his uniform, and told us he was under marching orders, and must go at once. I shall never forget those hours. The streets were crowded, people were shouting and rushing about, the sky all red, and the flames streaming up, and now and then the booming of exploding guns. Poor Aunty crying and clinging to Clayton, he trying to excite her to zeal in the 'glorious cause,' as he calls it, and begging me not to leave her, when at last he had to go. We have not heard a word from him since. I see no one but

poor Aunt, and the Doctor, the servants, and one or two neighbors. I think we are in no sort of danger ; I am quite well, and will write whenever I can hope to send. Don't let dear Pen worry about me. I am sure God will bring us all together by and by, and I know that I am of more use here, than I could be anywhere else just now. Perhaps I can persuade Aunt to go home with me when she is stronger, and yet she [*we* was first written, but carefully marked out] will be more likely to get news from Clayton here. So we can only wait and hope, and pray for each other. People here speak about the North in a way that I can hardly bear, but I clench my teeth and my hands, out of sight, and say nothing for Aunt's sake."

"O dear-me-sorrows !" cried Samanth, when this was read, sniffing away a tear, "to think of our Lally's larnin' patience an' prudence in sech a hard school as that." Months passed before another letter came. The long quiet of Beebury was stirred into new currents of feeling and action. Enlisting and drilling among the men ; sewing and knitting, for the soldiers, among the women, — took precedence, in interest, of the old

routine of field and household labor. Penny continued teaching until the long summer vacation, and did her best to cheer the mothers, wives, and sweethearts of the absent, though her own heart ached for news of her sister, aunt, and cousin.

Samanthy worked more diligently than ever, making and selling butter and cheese, mending and saving in every possible way, for prices were rising, and the Elder's pay came in very slowly and uncertainly.

She was growing more and more stern and silent, in the absence of the girls and the pressure of new anxieties. She saw, before any one else, a steady failing in the Elder's memory and strength, but would not confide it to Penny. "Bad enough for her to be shet off from all tidin's of Lally, 'thout this 'ere dispensation top o' that. She's larned her woman's lesson a'ready, that keepin' busy's the best intment for an achin' heart."

Hiram, too, had his share of the troubles

of the time. Manly, intelligent, and brave, he could not fail to be among the first to step forward when his President called. The night that the news came of the attack on the Massachusetts Sixth in Baltimore, he went into the Elder's study to tell him he must go. Samantha guessed his purpose by his resolute look, and *her knowledge of what she should do in his place*; and rubbed so hard on the brass candlesticks she was polishing, that no skin was left on her flying knuckles.

After nearly an hour, Hiram came out, looking pale and worn, as if from a struggle. He would have left the house without a word, but his sister's white, silent look of inquiry stopped him a moment in the door-way.

"I *was* hopin' to go with the other boys, S'manthy; but the Elder thinks he's breakin' down, an' that I'd orter stan' by him an' the place an' the gals" — His voice broke; he set his teeth hard, and stamped his foot in fierce impatience of his own weakness, and hastily

strode off to the fields, but not before Samantha had caught his hand in hers, with an appreciating squeeze, saying, —

“You’re on the right track, Hiram: it’s braver stayin’ than goin’ this time, I b’lieve.”

CHAPTER XI.

“Nor is that wind less rough, which blows a good man’s barge.”

Empedocles. — MATTHEW ARNOLD.

IF Hiram had any doubts as to his decision, they were effectually removed a few weeks later. The news of the rout at Bull Run, and the prospect of a long war which it opened, proved too great a shock for the gentle Elder, in whom an earnest loyalty was united with a sincere love for his wife’s home, the scene of his happiest years.

He was stricken down by paralysis; and though, in the course of weeks, he recovered so far as to speak intelligibly, move about with Hiram’s help, and enjoy sitting in the sunshine, his powers of reasoning and recollection were permanently injured, and there was no hope that he would ever preach again.

The summer vacation had begun; and Pen was at home, to the unspeakable comfort of Hiram and Samanthly. To her surprise and distress, she found she was no longer first with her father. If Samanthly were out of his sight, he became restless; constantly claimed her help and attention when she was near; and seemed to find infinite rest and support in her abrupt vigor and cheerful decisiveness. Hiram came next in his favor; was always greeted with a smile, and sometimes, in the pathetically faltering speech, with the words, "Welcome, my son;" but Pen, no one could say why,—but it may have been because she was absent so much during the months when he felt himself failing,—seemed to have drifted out of the inner circle of his thoughts; and, though always treated with gentle courtesy, was never called upon, if the others were present. The pain with which she perceived this change was softened by the thought that she should now be free to teach again when school opened.

—a most important duty, now that she would be the principal bread-winner of the family. The church had voted to continue the Elder's salary through the current year, but was too poor to do more. Hiram cared faithfully for every foot of the little farm, and Samanthy sold more butter and cheese than any one else in town could, from two cows; but the family means were greatly straitened, and the times grew ever harder. Letters from Lally came at long and irregular intervals; but, being necessarily subjected to official inspection, were generally brief, constrained, and unsatisfactory. She had removed to Richmond with Aunt Virginia in the early summer, because there they were near Clayton, and could communicate freely with him, which would have been impossible at Norfolk. They were living with a sister of Dr. Lee's, and the Norfolk house was let, giving Aunt Virginia a modest income.

“We are both well,” wrote Lally in November, “and I should be quite happy if I knew you were. I have

not had a letter from you for four months, and cannot understand why, unless it is because you wrote to Norfolk, and the letters have never been forwarded. I try to believe you are all well ; but this silence is very hard to bear, and I long unspeakably to see you. I dare not ask Aunty to go North until spring ; but perhaps she will then, and in that hope I wait, knowing that in the mean time I am of much comfort to her. I must tell you a wonderful thing from C.'s last letter. He says the mail came into camp one day when they had been weeks without letters, and were just wild for news from home. When the letters were distributed, C. had three, and his friend, Ashley, none. A. was awfully disappointed, of course, and begged to be allowed to read one of C.'s. So C., who had read two, handed one of them to him, saying, — 'Here, you may read my mother's, if you like,' — but in his hurry gave him mine ; and the first words A. saw were, 'Yours lovingly, Lally Mason,' written across the top, where I always finish, you know. He stopped reading, and called out, 'Here's some mistake, C. ! Who under heavens is Lally Mason ?' Of course C. was indignant at first, but they soon came to an understanding ; and what do you think ? Mr. Ashley's father found that old, old letter of ours to the slaves, that we put into Hiram's box of plantation shoes in our baby days ! M. Ashley has kept it as a curiosity all these years pasted into his pocket-book ; and C. actually saw

and sent me a correct copy. I cried over it like a baby, Pen ; it brought back old times so : but did you ever hear of any thing so strange as its turning up again ? ”

This letter infused new hope and courage into Pen's faithful heart, and enabled all to pass a cheerful Thanksgiving Day. Pen had secretly dreaded the return of the festal season, with its inevitable associations of happier days ; but good Mrs. Hopkins, divining her feelings, insisted that the whole family should dine with her and the Doctor.

It was the only place where they would have wished or dared to take the Elder ; but he seemed pleased to go, and all went off well, Samantha declaring that “ ’twas a blessin’ she’d never known afore, to eat a Thanksgivin’ dinner that she had not cooked herself.” The winter went quietly by, and spring found Pen still teaching, Hiram and Samantha busy at home, and the Elder living a gentle invalid life ; while a theological student, on sick-leave from his seminary, preached in his stead.

One afternoon in the latter part of May, the warm weather having fairly set in, even in the mountain region of Beebury, Mrs. Hopkins was hard at work putting away woollens and furs for the season. Sleigh-robcs, extra blankets, the Doctor's heavy suits, her own merino dresses and stone-marten muff, collar, and cuffs, the red parlor-curtains, &c., were all to be shaken and brushed, in view of the insidiously lurking moth, and folded away in the big chest in the garret, with plentiful sprinklings of snuff, camphor being this year too expensive. As the day wore on, the heat increased ; and the good lady's face grew redder and redder from the vigor of her exertions. One by one she twitched off, as unbearable, her collar, cuffs, cap, dress-skirt, and basque, and stood at last unhampered, but glowing still, in an old calico jacket and striped bal-moral petticoat. Her hair, which was still pretty and abundant, had tumbled down during her wrestling with the curtains ; and, to use her own words, had been "wobbed up anyhow, to be

out of the way," and she was often obliged to stop to breathe, and wipe the beads of dew from her upper lip, to say nothing of spasmodic fits of sneezing, superinduced by the pungent snuff. "I suppose I'm a fool not to call Doctor to help me," she panted, as she toiled up the steep garret stairs with her fifth armful, and made an ineffectual attempt to open the heavy chest with her elbow. "He's always willing enough; but that ain't all. *Men mean well*, but they're all thumbs when they try to do women's work; sure to fold left if you fold right,—give a twitch just when you ain't ready, and pull a thing right away; and yet, for all their awkwardness, they think they know more about it than you do, and are forever trying to teach you a better way. Besides, I dare say he's taking a sly little nap over his books, though he wouldn't own to it."

She was only half wrong. The Doctor had finished his sleep, and was preparing to go across the green to the post-office, where the tri-weekly stage had just arrived, bringing his beloved

“Journal.” Since the war began, he had never failed to awaken at mail-time, however sleepless the previous night. Suddenly he skipped to the foot of the stairs, and called in a mysterious, muffled voice,—

“Persis, Persis! Look out the front window! Two ladies have come on the stage, and are crossing over this way! I do believe that tall stylish girl is one of your New York cousins. Do hurry down! I’m off the back way for my paper.”

“Stop! stop! Doctor!” screamed his wife, who had flown to peep through the “bowed” blinds. “I’m all undressed! I *can’t* come down. O Glorianna! it’s Lally Mason and her little aunt! Thank the Lord for his goodness! I don’t care *how* I look.” And the impulsive, motherly, though childless, woman, ran down the stairs, pushed open the green-blind doors, and laughing, crying, and kissing, dragged her visitors in before the Doctor could escape or realize what had happened.

While Aunt Virginia and Mrs. Hopkins were exchanging an incoherent freshet of questions, apologies, answers, and exclamations, Allegra — taller and paler than of old, and with an indescribable new air of dignity and elegance, stepped directly to the Doctor, and taking his hand in both hers, said in an unnaturally quiet voice, —

“How are all at home? tell me truly and quickly.”

“Your father better, the rest perfectly well, dear child,” he answered, and kissed her on the forehead.

She turned abruptly away, and with a loud, shuddering sob, threw herself on her knees by the sofa, and, burying her face in the cushion, burst into uncontrollable crying, that shook her from head to foot.

The elder ladies flew to her side in alarm ; but the Doctor, declaring that it would do her good, turned them both out, bidding his wife make Mrs. Lee comfortable, and get tea, after which

he would drive both the ladies to the Elder's house. He let the weary, excited girl cry as long as she would, restraining her only by his presence, and a gentle touch now and then on her hair. At last she became still, and then he made her lie comfortably on the sofa, drink a quieting draught, and listen to a full account of all that had passed during the fifteen months of her absence. He dwelt briefly upon her father's illness, though preparing her to find him much changed, but spoke long and earnestly in praise of Pen's courage and sweetness, and Samanthy and Hiram's faithful devotion.

Lally was eager to see them all immediately, but he prevailed upon her to rest and wait. After tea he would take her home; and, if she slept well that night, he himself would take her to Mrs. Buttrick's in the morning to see Pen.

"Poor Mrs. Buttrick is one of the greatest sufferers from this wretched war," he added, trying to divert her from her own family affairs. "Beethoven was one of the first to go, and the

younger boys soon followed. After the battle of——, Beethoven was reported missing, and no tidings of him came for a whole month. I feared for his mother's reason. She said 'I could bear it to know he was dead, for he was a consistent perfesser, an' a good boy, but this onsartainty is drivin' me mad. When I go to swaller my food, I think mebbe he's starvin', an' it chokes me. Ef I drink, I seem to hear him beggin' for water, an' when I go to bed, I dream that he's a-lyin' on the wet ground, wounded an' dyin', an' nobody to tend on him.' She lost all interest in her household affairs, and I believe she would have lost her reason too, if she had not taken to working in the fields with her husband. 'Putterin' round alone, at things I've done so long I c'd do 'em with my eyes shet, never 'll take my mind off my boy; but this spadnin' an' hoein' an' tryin' to keep up with Ezra, an' the fresh air sort of soothin' my head, helps me, an' I git so dead tired I c'n sleep without dreamin'.' At last a letter came from Pulaski Dewey, with certain news of poor

Buttrick's death. Dewey and he were both wounded, but contrived to crawl into the woods together ; and there Beethoven died from loss of blood, suffering little, and tended by his old neighbor, who buried him, marked the spot, and found his way into the Union lines, two weeks after, very nearly starved. To know that her son was cared for, and not alone, comforted the mother greatly, and now she is quite calm and like herself, but keeps poor little Clary with her, most of the time."

"Clary?" questioned Lally, who had been listening intently but so quietly, that the Doctor was secretly admiring his own skill as a nurse.

"Yes, didn't I tell you? Clary Flanders. It turns out she was secretly engaged to Beethoven, just before he left. Even her mother didn't know it, and the poor child had been breaking her heart and saying nothing."

"O poor Clary! dear little Clary! I am so sorry for her," cried Lally, losing her calmness all at once, and breaking out again into such

wild weeping, that the Doctor called himself a fool for talking so much, made her drink more ammonia, and promise to go to sleep, with which view he left her alone, having carefully darkened the room. Like a tired child, she did sleep soon, and being utterly weary in mind and body, and greatly relieved to be at her journey's end, neither stirred nor wakened until late in the evening. Meanwhile Hiram, having heard at the post-office of her arrival, verified the news at the Doctor's, and with his leave, and the loan of his horse and chaise, was driving swiftly up Honey Hill, bearing the tidings to Pen; and when Lally at last opened her eyes, her sister was sitting smiling beside her.

CHAPTER XII.

"Could'st thou but once discern
Thou hast no right to bliss,
No title from the gods to welfare and repose,
Then thou would'st look less mazed
Whene'er of bliss debarred,
Nor think the gods were crazed
When thine own lot went hard."

Empedocles, — MATTHEW ARNOLD.

ANOTHER year passed over Beebury, and still the best of her sons were away in camp and hospital; while the old men and younger boys did double duty on the farms, and the mothers, wives, and sisters cooked, knitted, sewed, and prayed, and wrote long letters to the absent, which braced heart and hand to noble daring, and—harder task—patient enduring.

The Elder was gently slipping away from life; smaller and smaller grew the circle of his

powers and pleasures. To sit in the sun, watching Samanthly at work, to receive his food from her hand, to hear Lally read from his well-worn copy of Milton, and to watch for Hiram's return, formed now his whole day. That he should be restless and impatient if the Bible or any devotional book were read to him had been a great surprise to the family, and a scandal to the parish, until Dr. Hopkins explained that his mind was thereby recalled to his old duties, and doubtless distressed by its ineffectual attempts to carry on connected trains of thought and reasoning, and to construct sermons and addresses as in times past.

When Lally was absent, Samanthly would avoid the afternoon reading as long as she could, trying to divert the Elder by talking, while she sewed or knitted, until, at last, the patient wistfulness of his glance from her to the volume now always within reach of his hand would conquer, and, with a sniff and a toss of her head, she would say,—

"Wal, ef *you* can stan' my hoppin' an' stumblin' among them outlandish words, I s'pose I'd orter," and, opening at his favorite shorter poems, would begin, with sternly knitted brows, and frequent gaspings, and wetting of her lips with her tongue, —

"Hence, loathed Melancholy,
Of Cerberus and blackest midnight born," &c.

"Onct," she confided to Hiram, "I saw a lot of names comin', worse 'n the second chapter of Acts, and thinks-says-I, I'll skip, and he'll never know ; but he *did*, bless you, an' I hed to go back an' tackle 'em, arter all! I can per-nounce most on 'em now pooty glib, an' some parts I c'n understan', an' some I kinder like the sound of without gettin' the sense, like a good ol' tune to meetin' without hearin' the words ; but I'm free to confess I'd ruther shell corn enny day, ef 'tworn't for seein' the comfort he takes."

And the Elder would sit and listen as long as she would read, a happy smile on his lips, a

dreamy look in his eyes ; while his thin, blue-veined hands moved slowly up and down on the polished arms of his chair.

This was a very frequent occurrence ; for Lally, in her deep-lying sympathy for those who had dear ones in the army, had formed the habit of carrying the letters — brought three times a week by the stage—to such families as lived at a distance from the post-office, and could not spare time in the haying season to come to the village on an uncertainty. She had begun by taking those for Pulaski Dewey's mother, thereby enjoying a brief sight of Pen and the thanks of the widow, in return for her long walk ; but gradually one and another of the neighbors had begged the same favor, "if she was comin' that way ;" and it had become almost a matter of course. Nor was she often obliged to walk ; for, in the general war-interest, somebody's horse was almost always at her disposal for her kindly task.

One August afternoon, during Pen's vacation,

Lally having been at home over a year, the sisters went as usual to the office, found no letters for themselves, but one for Samantha, and quite a bundle for the "hill-folks," as the post-mistress phrased it, handing them to Lally with the usual, —

"S'pose you're goin' up?"

"Yes."

"Wal, Deacon Sawyer left word 't you could hev his sorrel, ef you hed a mind to hitch her up. He an' the boys is usin' the oxen to-day in the fur lot."

"That's nice!" said Lally, rousing herself from the sadness that always came over her when there was no letter from her aunt, long since returned to Virginia. "Come, Pen, it's just the day for a ride; and we'll keep on and call on Mrs. Buttrick after we've left the letters."

Pen followed, only lingering to hand back Samantha's letter to the post-mistress, saying, —

"I'll leave this : Hiram may come in."

She had noticed, what Lally had not, that it bore the Virginia mail-mark, though addressed in an unfamiliar hand ; and an undefined dread made her wish to delay further knowledge.

The drive proved a pleasant one ; for Pen's being quiet was nothing unusual, and Lally seemed for the time to have recovered something of her old lightness of mood. As the fat, sleepy horse jogged up the long, sandy hill, she talked and laughed over childish adventures, recalled by places they passed, and had a pleasant word for every one they met.

"Nothing to-day, but better luck to-morrow," she called to a pale little wife of a year who came out with a minute babe in her arms, and looked wistfully at the bundle of letters.

"I grudge these," she cried soon after, leaning out of the wagon to drop two letters and a paper into a rude wooden box, with a lid hanging by one leathern hinge, which was nailed to the road-side gate-post of a reputedly rich and

miserly old bachelor, who had recently refused to open his house for "soldiers' sewing-meeting," though it was the largest on the hill. "I grudge all but army letters now-a-days, Pen, I believe; and it doesn't make a bit of difference that poor Clayton is on one side, and everybody else I know on the other. All I feel is, how hard it is for us women to wait and fear at home," and the sad lines re-appeared on the face Pen loved so well, and had never studied in vain, until since the southern visit.

"Stop," cried Lally, after a pause; "there is Mrs. Sanborn beckoning to us. There is no letter for her to-day; we took her one Monday I remember, it was from New Orleans."

"O girls!" cried Mrs. Sanborn, coming breathlessly to the wagon-side, her check apron thrown over her head as a sunshade, "what do you think? Dannel Plummer's dead! We got the news in Henry's letter that you fetched up Monday. He died of a fever, down to New Orleans, in a Catholic hospital! Oh, ain't it

dreadful! An' we hain't had courage to tell his wife yet."

Pen and Lally exchanged looks of distress and amazement, and glanced involuntarily at Mrs. Plummer's little unpainted house, not a stone's throw from Mrs. Sanborn's gate.

"I know we'd some of us ought to," apologized the good woman; "an' so this morning Melissey an' me drawed lots, an' it fell to her; an' she was jest goin' over, when who should come in but Mis' Plummer herself, all fixed to go blackberryin'. 'O, Mis' Sanborn,' says she, 'will you let Danny stay 'long o' your boys, to-day? I'm goin' to pick berries for jam. My man he's a master-hand for blackberry jam; an' I thought I'd make up a lot, so 's to send him ef I had a chance, an' he didn't git a furlough this fall.' We couldn't 'a' told her *then*, to save us, an' she a-smilin', an' swingin' her ten-quart pail, as car'less as a school-girl. An' off she went, an' she's only jest come back. I saw her goin' in her back door, as you come in sight, an' I thought I'd wait an' see if you had a letter for her."

Lally shook her head.

"Well, don't you think, bein' the Elder's girls, you know, p'raps she'd take it kinder easier if you" —

The sisters shrank back involuntarily; and Mrs. Sanborn, ashamed of her own cowardice, was silent too, when Mrs. Plummer appeared at her front door, shading her eyes with her arm, — a tall, handsome, gipsy-looking young woman, — and pity and sympathy suddenly mastered every thing else in impetuous Lally, and crying, —

"I'll tell her. You go on, Pen; leave the other letters, and come back for me as soon as you can," she jumped from the wagon, snatched Henry's letter from his thankfully apologetic mother, went swiftly up the ragged path, and disappeared in the house with its owner.

"You've got a letter for me, hain't you?" said the latter, joyfully. "You're awfully good, Lally Mason, to come 'way up here, I do say."

"No, it isn't for you, it's from Henry Sanborn; but his mother thought" —

"Well, that's too bad of Dannel," interrupted the wife, peevishly: "he hain't written to me once, where Henry's wrote his folks three times! I do believe it's most two months sence" —

"But he has been sick," said Lally, — "very sick," she added, seeing an incredulous look on the massive and now sullen features. "Henry says he's been in the hospital. Don't you want to sit down and let me read to you about it?" her knees beginning to tremble.

Mrs. Plummer sat down, but her face was turned away, till Lally began to read some unimportant sentences in such a trembling voice, that she was roused, and sharply said, —

"He ain't much sick, is he?"

Lally nodded, tears running down her cheeks.

"Oh, read it quick! He wasn't out of his head, was he? Poor Dannel! No wonder he didn't write! He didn't want to scare me. He's awful good to me, Dannel is. He'll be mad

with Henry, I know he will! How long was he abed? Not to call dangerous, was he? Oh, *do* lemme see!"

"Oh, wait!" cried Lally, "let me read it to you;" and, with a great effort, and pausing between each few words, —

"Daniel was one of the first cases — and, in spite of the best of care — he grew worse and worse — and last Friday the Doctor gave him up — and about midnight" — Lally stopped, put her arms around the poor wife, hardly older than herself, and solemnly added, — "he died!"

Mrs. Plummer gave one wild, inquiring look into Lally's face, then sat as one stunned, mechanically plaiting the hem of her coarse apron, and at last slow tears began to fall.

"I never thought he'd die 'way off there," she said at length, in a strange, dreamy voice. "He was always good to me, Dannel was; an' so rugged, I never thought he'd die and leave me an' Danny alone."

"He had the best of care, Henry says,"

ventured Lally. "Shall I read you the rest now?"

This she did, explaining as well as she could about sisters of charity and army hospitals to the bewildered and ignorant girl by her side, who, in the midst, picked up the envelope from the floor, and, pointing to the gaily colored figure of a soldier, printed on one corner, — that army-stationery, so common then, so laid away in treasured bundles now, said, —

"It looks like Dannel, don't it? Oh, it does, certain! Do you b'lieve Mis' Sanborn'll care if I keep it?" and suddenly began to cry bitterly over the poor little tawdry picture, which, in fact was as unlike her stern-featured, heavy-shouldered husband as a slim boy well could be. She was still sobbing convulsively, and Lally gently touching her bent head in shy sympathy from time to time, when Pen came in.

"I guess I ain't very polite," cried the young widow, starting to her feet. "You're very kind, Lally, and you too, Penny; but p'raps you'd

better come again some other day, an' please tell Mis' Sanborn I'll send the letter home to-morrow—an' you take them plums, do—all on 'em: I got 'em for my man, he's such a hand for jam—an' now—I can't never cook for him no more."

She hastily covered her face with her apron, pushed the berry-pail towards them, and ran into an inner room, as they softly closed the outer door, and left her with her trouble. The homeward ride was very sad and silent; but, before the sun had set, Mrs. Plummer and her loss were completely blotted from the girls' minds. Samantha's letter, as Pen feared, was from Aunt Virginia's sister-in-law, and brought the news of Clayton Lee's instant death by the premature bursting of a shell.

The next six months were so sad, that, even when serener years came, Pen did not like to recall them. Lally was greatly overcome by the news of Clayton's death; her grief was bit-

ter, stormy, and rebellious ; and so beyond any ordinary, cousinly feeling, as to make it painfully evident to her sister, Samanthly, and even Hiram, that she had given him her whole girlish heart. She went about like one for whom the world is hopelessly darkened ; lost her appetite, neglected her duties, became careless in her dress, absent-minded, petulant, and spiritless ; nor could any gentle leading from her sister, or plain questioning on Samanthly's part, induce her to open her heart. She refused comfort and sympathy alike. This was bad enough ; but, as the winter advanced, and stormy winds and blockaded roads obliged her to confine herself more and more to the house, thus losing the relief of her long walks, she became subject to occasional hysterical attacks of great violence, followed by such utter prostration, that she could not rise from bed next day. The brunt of all this came, of course, upon faithful Samanthly, who, under Dr. Hopkins's instructions, cared for the sufferer with unfailing patience and firm-

ness, concealing the worst from Pen, who was teaching again, and only at home once a week. That tender heart, however, suffered keenly from her sister's condition and moods, "and the days were dark and dreary."

"If she would only tell me all about it, I think it would help her, and I could bear it better," she said one Saturday night to Samantha, when Lally had gone to bed early, saying that her head "ached too much even to hear about your school, Pen dear." The Elder was long since asleep, and Hiram in the barn, so poor Pen slid down to the floor, rested her head on her old friend's knee, and sobbed as she had not since childhood. Samantha's knitting and spectacles slipped forgotten under the table, greatly to the kitten's joy, and her hard hands gently unpinned, unbraided, and smoothed out the weeping girl's long hair, as she said, —

"Jest you hev patience, dear child. Lally she'll come out all right, by'n by; she's jest like a colt when you fust put on a halter; she

don't know what to do with her trouble, an' she'll toss, an' kick, an' fret a while, but at last she'll find out what it means, an' *who's a doin' of it*, an' then she'll be our own gal again. Don't you be afeard! It's allers darkest jest afore day, but I do avum an' avow, for all I like your aunt well enough, I wish that 'ere rebel boy o' hern hadn't never come anigh Beebury."

Hiram, coming in, heard her last words, and seeing Pen's dejected attitude and flowing hair, softly slipped off his boots and went upstairs to bed, muttering between his set teeth as he gained a safe distance, "Amen to that, Samantha."

But Pen had another trouble which she could tell to no one. She received about this time a letter from John Stedman, the quiet scholarly teacher of classics, at Greenville Academy, during her happy two years there. He had made her feel then, she hardly knew how, that she was different from all other girls in his eyes; and his rare compliments and confidences had been shyly treasured in her inmost heart

ever since. In his letter he eloquently confessed his preference, explained that poverty alone had kept him silent so long, and asked her if she could love and trust him well enough to accept him as her husband, and share his fortunes, now that he had obtained a good position as Principal of a High School in a large town in Michigan. He begged for an immediate answer, as his duties would require his presence there, in a few months.

Pen dared not dwell on the vision of how wide and sweet life might become, if spent with him who had so long been her model of manly excellence, her knight, her hero. She firmly said to herself that her invalid father, her suffering twin-sister, must be her first duty. The former might live many years, and certainly could endure no great change. To leave Lally was impossible, and even if Mr. Stedman should ask her to share their home, how might she not suffer from a climate even harsher than her own? Promptly, but with untold heartache and tears, Pen wrote her answer, saying firmly that

it could not be, and then tried, God only knew how vainly, to rejoice that no second letter ever came.

In February, when "the days began to lengthen, and the cold began to strengthen," the Elder died in his sleep, and was found by Hiram in the morning, with a calm, nay triumphant look upon his face. Prepared as they had been for the event, and little as they had leaned upon his gentle, unpractical arm, the sisters were greatly shocked and distressed. Death had never, in their remembrance, been in the house ; they were orphans, and there was a terrible chill in the thought. It proved a blessing in disguise, however ; for it broke down the reserve between them, and showed Lally, as by a flash of lightning, how selfishly cruel had been her behavior. On the first night after their bereavement, she opened her heart to Pen, and sobbed out her story in those tender arms.

"I loved him from the first, Pen ! How could

I help it? So winning, so superior to all I had seen! But I didn't really understand myself. Until I went to Norfolk, I was only a shy, happy child; but when I saw him there, among other girls, many much prettier than I, and far more like him,—stylish and lively, you know,—and when I heard them sing and play, and talk fast, and amuse him, as I never could, I think I became a woman all at once, I suffered so; and I saw that some of them liked him as much as I did, so I tried my best to improve myself, and to keep any one from suspecting what I felt. But oh! when that last dreadful night came, and he told me he was going, and for what,—it froze my heart within me, Pen: it came so suddenly! We were alone, for he had an idea of getting me to break it to his mother. I cannot tell you what I did, or how I looked; but I lost all my strength, and the world seemed to whirl away from me, till suddenly I found he was kneeling by my chair, and kissing my hands, and calling me his darling. Then he said he had always

thought me very sweet, but supposed that I didn't care a bit for him ; and would I love him now, and be his own, and pray for him, and wait for him, even if he was a rebel. O Pen ! can you think what happiness it was ? No, you can't, for you have never — But it didn't last long, for he had to go, and he made me promise solemnly to tell no one of our engagement ; for his mother wanted him to marry a southern girl, and he didn't believe I would have strength to be true, and to love him, now that war had really come, and I must return to the North. Oh ! you may guess how I promised that I would for ever — but I mustn't think of that, or I shall go wild. Fancy, if you can, Pen, how I felt when his mother told me, after he had been gone some time, that he had been in love with Mary Grahame for years, — she was the gayest and handsomest of those girls, — and that, after encouraging him to the utmost, she had refused him, and engaged herself to a rich old planter just two days before Clayton went away ! Aunt

said she 'ought not to tell me, for he had made her vow never to breathe it to any one; but of course she knew it would be safe with me, who was just like a sister to him.' You know her soft, pretty way of relieving her mind, Pen, and how she always must have sympathy. She little knew how she was torturing me with the discovery that I had been only an after-thought, and a consolation that perhaps he would never have dreamed of, if he hadn't seen how I loved him, and been feeling lonely and piqued just then. I hated myself for my easy faith in his love, and my haste to assure him of mine; for I had already written him such letters as a girl would write to her lover who has gone into danger. Where are they now, do you suppose? I fought with myself day and night, sometimes hoping that I should never see him again, sometimes praying that I might yet be his happy wife; now strong in my pride, and then all broken down by a loving note from him, or a dream of seeing him wounded. Then there was all the anxiety one

has for a soldier, and all the bitterness of knowing that people here hated him and his cause. Often and often I have stopped my ears when they have prayed in meeting that the rebels might be defeated and put to confusion. Then came the news of his death, and not a word for me! And I gave myself up to despair and have been hateful and wicked to you and Samanthy, and careless of my poor, dear father; and now he is gone, and I can never ask him to forgive me." Here she gave way to such convulsive crying, that Pen, lavishing upon her the tenderest caresses, was seriously alarmed; and Samanthy, who had been lying awake in the next room, anxious, yet rejoicing that confession had come at last, finally came in, wrapped in a blanket, and bearing a candle, and said firmly, —

"Lally Mason, ef you don't want your sister laid out flat with a narvous headache to-morrer, an' you no better yourself, you'll jest say your 'Now I lay me,' an' go off to sleep, and let her."

Then, with hands far more gentle than her words, she disengaged their clinging arms, shook and smoothed each pillow, made the girls lie down, straightened and retucked the bed-clothes, brushed each cheek with one of her hasty, shame-faced kisses, and stalked away, remarking,—

“There is times, an’ there is seasons; an *I* b’lieve the Lord gev the night for sleep.”

CHAPTER XIII.

"Shall we expect from time, the physician of brutes, a lingering and uncertain deliverance? Shall we wait to be happy till we can forget that we are miserable, and owe to the *weakness* of our faculties a tranquillity which ought to be the result of their *strength*?"

LORD BOLINGBROKE.

WE must now refer briefly to parish matters.

The theological student previously alluded to having returned refreshed to his seminary in the autumn, Beebury church-goers had since been suffering from the usual succession of missionary agents, and invalid, and otherwise "*stickit*" ministers, to use the expressive Scotch phrase. In the spring succeeding the Elder's death, becoming weary of these temporary supplies, and having no longer to pay Mr. Mason's salary, they agreed to "call" a Mr. Kilburn to become their settled pastor. He was a plain but excellent man; with less refinement and

education than his predecessor, but far more practical sense, and "a better hand for social visitin' an' gettin' acquainted."

He had a thin, hard-working, "capable" wife, and four children between the ages of three and thirteen; but was hopeful of living on the five hundred a year offered him, provided a parsonage could be added. Many and perplexed were the church-meetings when his decision was made known; and at last Dr. Hopkins was appointed a committee of one "to ascertain what the sisters Mason would take for their farm and buildings."

It was at once a sad trial and a great temptation to our girls, and was soberly considered and discussed by them with Samanthy and Hiram. One rainy Sunday evening, which Jane Austen says — and no one knew human nature better — is the time of times for confidential talk, the four sat late around the open wood-fire in the kitchen, having resolved to send in their decision on Monday.

"It seems to me," said Lally, who was wrapped in a soft white shawl of Pen's knitting, in spite of the snapping fire, "if we put the price of the place at interest, we could hire rooms somewhere, and live on the income, by taking in a little sewing, and then Pen need not teach. I would rather live on potatoes and milk than have her away any longer."

"That ain't no great of a sacrifice, Lally," interrupted Samantha, "for you don't eat enough to keep a bird now."

Pen looked anxiously at her sister, and said, —

"We should not feel the winds so much in the Hollow, and Mrs. Flanders and Clary are very anxious we should take part of their house. We couldn't be with kinder, quieter people."

"Thet's so," said Samantha; "an' ef you'll 'gree to take a rest from teachin', Penny, I'm one for that idee. House-work'll be dreffle easy in that little place, an' mebbe a change'll do us all good; but I wanter know what Hiram's plannin' 'mounts to, that he's so awfle still 'bout."

"Yes, Hiram," said Pen, "you told us to count you out of our new arrangements, and you would tell us soon what you meant to do. Something near us, I hope, for we shall miss you terribly: shan't we, Lally?"

"Yes, indeed! Do marry a rich widow with a big farm, Hiram, and invite us all to tea once a week."

"Shoe-bizness to Coneford more likely," guessed Samanthly; while Pen suggested that perhaps he would stay and manage the farm for Mr. Kilburn, see that her favorite cow was kindly treated, and that none of the cinnamon rose-bushes were cut away from the dear old orchard door-step.

"I wish I *could* do that much for you, Penny," he replied, so soberly that they all looked up.

"I'm a-goin' to see the war out, girls. You don't need me now, for Samanthly'll see to things; an' I can't stand it no longer without doin' my part."

"O Lord above!" cried Samanthly, and threw

her apron over her head, more utterly surprised and dismayed than the girls had ever seen her.

They were quite silent for some moments ; and Hiram, who had been gazing steadily into the fire, at last looked up, and experienced the most bitterly sweet moment he had ever known. Pen's beautiful, earnest eyes were full of tears ; and, meeting his, brimmed over. She put up her hands and cried, without attempting to conceal it. He knew it was only from surprise, and for "auld lang syne's" sake ; but it thrilled him to the core, and came back to him again and again with inspiring force in the crowded loneliness of a private's life in camp, in many a keen emergency of the battle-field. A month later he was with the —th in active service, the girls and Samantha were installed in the Widow Flanders's front rooms, and the tribe of Kilburn possessed the old home in their stead. The change proved at first a very happy one for our heroines and their old friend. The price of the estate gave them

income sufficient to pay their rent and house-keeping expenses, with Samantha's help; for, by her express wish, she no longer received wages from them, but paid her proportion of all outlay from the interest of her long-saved and well-invested earnings.

"T'aint no ways likely that the jints an' sinnoos of sixty-year-old are wuth ez much ez young uns, an' I'll 'gree to let you gals do two-thirds o' the work, ef you'll give me the prevvylidge of payin' my shear, an' feelin' as ef I was one o' the family, an' not nobuddy's hired help no more. Mebbe it's sinfle pride, an' mebbe it's laziness, but that's what I puppose, ef you hain't no objections."

"The only objection I see, you dear old humbug, is, that you never will let us do our share of the work," cried Lally.

"Ez to that," retorted Samantha, "nobuddy's back ain't a-goin' to be broke with what we've got to do here. Now't we hain't got your blesse father to wait on; an' Hiram he's a-past o'

cookin' an' mendin' for; an' no milk, nor butter, nor cheese chores; an' no sewin'-s'ieties, nor donation-parties to git fixed for, an' cleared-up arter" —

"And no colporteurs or exchange-preachers and their wives to stay over Sabbath," interrupted Lally.

"Yes, an' no libe'ry books to kiver, nor Sabbath papers to write on, an' cirkylate, nor 'Sociation comp'ny, I feel ez ef I was on a visit somewheres, an' hadn't no work to do, an' so I've laid out to take in a little tailorin' now an' then, to kinder pass away the time."

To Pen, the rest from teaching, and the pleasure of being with her sister, were happiness enough; and, but for her anxiety about Lally's health, the spring and summer would have been almost unclouded in their peaceful, simple happiness, in spite of her heart-hidden "it might have been." The cold Lally had taken the previous autumn, while carrying letters one rainy afternoon, during her gloomiest time, had left a

little cough, never quite shaken off; though she made light of it, and always had some excuse for her capricious appetite and want of strength. "I never was very hungry in warm weather, you know, Pen," or, "I believe my southern visit made me lazy," she would smilingly protest, if Pen glanced at her neglected plate, or looked anxious because Lally liked to sit while wiping dishes. "When Fall comes you will see how greedy and active I will be."

Hiram's letters came often, and were addressed in regular succession to the three, who answered them in like manner, and kept their soldier faithfully informed of all their own and the village doings. Who can estimate the power of such letters in inspiring men with hope, courage, patience, life itself? in restraining and shielding them from the hardening influences of the world? Lally took much pleasure in the companionship of pretty little Clary Flander her old school-mate and life-long crony, whose love-story had been so sadly like her own. Lall

never referred to Clayton in their talks; but there was no sting and no secret in Clary's sorrow, and it was to her a comfort to pour out all her heart, to speak of Beethoven's many virtues, and read over his letters to so sympathetic a listener.

Samanthy's "little tailorin'" project proved quite an important source of occupation and income; for Sophronia Elliot, who had cut and made jackets and trousers for Beebury boys for twenty years past, was also a professional nurse; and when, in August, scarlet-fever became epidemic in the neighborhood, she had little time for sewing, and sent all customers to her rival. Little Danny Plummer was among the stricken; and his mother, who had never forgotten Lally's sympathy, and had often brought her thank-offerings of berries and flowers, now sent her an urgent message to come and see him. Lally, who had had the fever in childhood, went at once. She found the child alone, in a small, stiflingly hot room, — window and door carefully closed, though the day was sultry and still, —

tossing in delirium on a feather-bed ; a bunch of sweet-fern, tied together, fading beside him, had evidently been used as a fan. In another moment, the mother appeared, coming panting up from the brook behind the house, with something struggling rolled in her apron.

“ O Lally ! ” she cried, “ how good you be ! I hain’t seen a soul to-day : folks is so scared of ketchin’ the fever. Shet the door, do : he’ll get his death-a-cold. See here ! I’ve ben to the brook and got a live frog : they say it’ll eat up the canker, ef I put it down Danny’s throat, an’ I’m a-goin’ to try it, for the poor child can’t swaller, nor goggle, nor hardly breathe. I must do somethin’, an’ the stuff the Doctor left don’t ’pear to do no kind o’ good.”

With much difficulty, Lally prevailed on the poor woman to abandon, or at least defer, this astounding method of cure, to let in a little fres’ air, change the feather-bed for one of straw, and cut off the tangled curls from the restless head. These changes sorely taxed Mrs. Plummer’s fai

in her visitor ; but by firmness and patience, and by promising to remain overnight, Lally at last accomplished them, and was rewarded by the evident relief of the child. Even with Dr. Hopkins's care, however, in addition to her faithful nursing, — she remained three days and nights, — the case proved a fatal one, and during the third night Danny was released from his pain. When Dr. Hopkins came next morning, Lally was in an exhausted sleep on the kitchen settle, a rude wooden bench with rockers, under which corn-cobs were wedged to keep it from moving. He listened anxiously to her quick breathing, and felt the pulse in her thin wrist with a very grave face.

“Let her sleep as long as she will,” he said to Mrs. Plummer ; “and when she wakes tell her I am coming this afternoon to take her home in my chaise.”

“Ain't a-goin' to hev the fever, is she? I shall never forgive myself ef Lally Mason gits enny harm here.”

"Oh, no ! but she needs rest, and so do you, Mrs. Plummer : I will try and get Mrs. Elliot to stay with you till after the funeral, and then you had better shut up the house a while, and come down to us. Mrs. Hopkins needs a little help in her house-cleaning and preserving, and it will make a change for you," he added kindly, taking the weeping woman's hand as he bade her good-morning.

Before sunset he returned, took Lally home, and ordered Pen to put her to bed, and make her sleep twenty-four hours ; then, taking Samanthi aside, he grew sober, and said, —

"There must be no more nursing done by that child, whoever sends for her. She has no strength to spare in watching, and is a great deal more like her mother than I wish to see. If we don't take the best of care, she will slip away from us. There is too little vitality, and no recuperative power. I will send her a tonic, and you must keep her cheerful and busy, but watch that she does not overdo."

The next victims of the epidemic were Mrs. Kilburn, the minister's wife, and her youngest child ; soon after which, the cases became lighter, and the dreaded disease gradually disappeared from the town. Mr. Kilburn soon came to see if Samanthy would again undertake the superintendence of the parsonage and its motherless children ; but, reinforced by the entreaties of Pen and Lally, Hiram's peremptory letters, and the Doctor's advice, she declined the honor as a permanent arrangement, though consenting to go for a few weeks. " Jest a little spell, till they kinder git on their feet agin, you know, an' see where they be. I shall soon be comin' back to you gals, to settle down for life, like a cross-grained ol' maid ez I be, an' the parson can spry round an' find somebuddy else ; git another wife, fur-ez-I-know."

CHAPTER XIV.

"Busied she seemed, and half distressed
To do for him and them the best."

Mari Magno. — CLOUGH.

COMPROMISES are dangerous things however; and this was no exception, but drew after it a train of consequences which even Samanthy's shrewdness could not foresee, which even her courage would have shrunk from. So we have often seen some unskilful player at checkers or chess, after long knitting of the brows, and many half-reachings of the hand, in endeavor to devise some series of moves which shall carry confusion into the enemy's lines, finally, in impatient self-disgust at the fruitless delay, make a sudden move which he thinks at least harmless, and finds, to his dismay, when too late, that he has thereby opened a way for t

foe to his "king-row," or exposed his most cherished pieces to destruction.

The first result was the revival of Samantha's love for her old home and duties. For nearly twenty years, she had been the ruling spirit in the first family in town. Her parlor had been better furnished, her spare beds more numerous and often filled, her kitchen larger and neater, her list of guests more distinguished, her rules for cake more sought after, than even Mrs. Deacon Sawyer's or Mrs. Dr. Hopkins's. To go from all these semi-official dignities on the Hill, to the humble domain of three little rooms at the Hollow, and do tailoress-work for Sophronia Elliot, was a fall indeed, although, as we have seen, she tried to look upon her new position as a rise in life, and had succeeded in concealing her home-sickness and sense of humiliation from the girls. They had no such feelings. Sincerely sorrowing for their father, each with a heart-ache to be silently lived down, — Pen, thoroughly weary of school-work; and Lally, lan-

guid, yet restless, — both found the change a welcome relief. From March till September, all was apparent contentment. Mr. Kilburn's appeal was like a stone thrown into a pool, which, Camarina-like, once disturbed, was long in regaining peace and clarity.

No Arab steed restored to the desert, no prisoned sailor returning to the sea, could have experienced a keener satisfaction than our Samanthy, reinstated in her big kitchen, her ample buttery and numberless cupboards, and to the care of her beloved cows, her churn, her triple meal-chest, and herb-hung garret! She could have shed joyful tears over the well-remembered crack in the hearth-stone, where the soap always would lodge in scouring, and the familiar squeak of the brick oven door, was sweet in her ears as bagpipes to a Highlander, or the Jodel to a Tyrolese.

Mr. Kilburn, though by no means an unpractical man, like Elder Mason, was too much absorbed in parish matters, and too thankful t

have his household wheels run smoothly—after so many weeks of confusion, distress, and sickness—to interfere in any way. Cordelia, the eldest child, was a tall, slender girl of thirteen, whose large, dark eyes seemed ever wistful with the remembrance of her dying mother's charge to "take care of father and the boys." She was, at first, a little jealous of Samantha's administration in that mother's place, and somewhat afraid of her, as well; but soon came to lean upon her as a real friend, who enlightened her ignorance of house-work, without laughing at her, and whose presence made beloved school once more possible. The two boys were easily won: Samantha helped them more liberally to buckwheats and maple syrup, and was not sterner in her door-mat and hat-hanging rules than their mother had been. That mother was, by them, forgotten sadly soon. She had been too hard-working and many-cared to pay them much attention beyond what concerned their food and clothing; and home had become little

more to them than their sleeping and eating head-quarters. School was their world, and a hard fight they had there, to make way against the inevitable, petty animosities and persecutions which assail newcomers from another town, especially when, by slightly better, or even differing, modes of dress or speech, they expose themselves to the vague and fatal suspicion of being "stuck-up."

Samanthy's stay being thus desired by all the family, and agreeable to herself, was prolonged from week to week, by ever-rising emergencies, which seemed to add duty to inclination; and, as she and the girls exchanged very frequent visits, she felt that she was still watching over them, while her wages were, at the same time, adding considerably to what she mentally regarded as the family fund. When she went to the Hollow, her whole talk was of the Kilburns, — when at the parsonage, she was even more eloquent in regard to the twins, — ar

soon Cordelia and the boys liked nothing better of an evening than to hear her picturesque narrations of what Penny and Lally and Hiram had done and said in old times, nor was their father inattentive. A strong, friendly feeling soon arose between the families. Mr. Kilburn told Samantha to take cream and fresh eggs to the "delicate Miss Mason" whenever she liked, and Cordelia formed a child's unquestioning passion for sweet-spoken Penny, whose help in her lessons was so much easier to ask than Papa's; while the boys vied with each other in bringing Hiram's letters from the post-office, and striving to imitate his oft-told feats in skating, climbing, and wood-splitting. Every pleasant morning, Lally walked up the hill for a little chat with her old friend; she called it taking her Jackman bitters, and insisted that it did her more good than all Dr. Hopkins's cod-liver oil. But alas! these calls soon made the slowly fading girl inspeakably homesick for the old rooms and well-known corners of her childhood's home.

Here she had first met Clayton, here spent so many carelessly happy years ; there were the successively rising marks of her height and Pen's on the side of the cellar-door ; and from the windows, — what a long-loved, glorious view of the pine-clad hills, and Bald Mountain's rugged side !

It had seemed sheltered and cosy at Mrs. Flanders's when March winds were loud and rough ; but now — beneath the watery reluctance of November sunshine, when the dead leaves, drifted into hollows, lay slowly decaying — it looked low, damp, unwholesomely still and shady. If Samanthy came to the Hollow to spend a week, Cordelia was always running down to consult her about some household perplexity, or to see dear Miss Pen ; and the minister, if going on some pleasant drive, would call and ask Miss Lally to "wrap up, and take the air with him." Mrs. Flanders and Clary had exchanged many a wise look, and the parish gossips had begun to talk in roguish whispers about the

“minister’s consolin’ himself,” and “the Mason girls goin’ back where they belonged,” long before such an idea occurred to Samantha, much less to our twins. In primitive and hard-working communities, a widower is never blamed for thinking of a new help-meet very soon, especially if he has young children; and even the mothers of grown-up daughters owned that no one could be fitter for the minister’s wife than Penny Mason, who was already a church-member, well versed in clerical housekeeping, and “none of your gad-about-flibbertigibbet kind.” When Thanksgiving Day drew near, Samantha was, of course, in demand to make the pies, &c., at the parsonage; and, while her honest heart was torn with the conflicting desires of presiding there — to see the fowls properly cooked, and the boys restrained from overeating — and spending the anniversary with her girls, she was deeply gratified by Mr. Kilburn’s commissioning her to ask the favor of their company to dinner on that day, “and Mrs. Flanders and her daughter too,

if you like," he added, in a burst of hospitable thoughtfulness.

Glowing with pride and pleasure, Samantha walked to the Hollow that very Saturday afternoon, and, meeting Mrs. Flanders at the door, announced her errand at once.

"Well I never!" exclaimed the widow, dropping into a chair. "Just hear this, Clary! we're all invited up to the minister's for Thanksgivin', an' here was you and me a-plannin' to have him an' his here, if we could make out to 'commodeate 'em all in our little rooms. As sure as you live, Samantha, we were just settin' chairs along, an' countin' how many we could squeeze in: weren't we, Clary?"

Clary confirmed the fact, but added, "It'll be twice as nice to go up there, mother; and isn't Mr. Kilburn real clever to think of us? and I'm sure, Samantha, if we can help you any way, getting ready for so many, we'll be glad and willing: won't we, mother?"

"Indeed we will! Just say the word, an' we'll

come, an' we won't breathe a word of what we're hopin' for, till you give us the wink: will we, Clary?"

"Oh, hush, mother!" cried the girl, blushing guiltily; "*she* might be coming in, and hear you, and I'm sure she hasn't an idea of it yet."

"That's as may be," laughed the widow, with a wink at Samanthy, who looked from one to the other in honest bewilderment. Before she was allowed to go upstairs, however, she was thoroughly informed of what "everybody was a-sayin', and hopin' too, 'cept the cross-grained ones, like 'Lecty Sage, that you never *can* suit."

She was so entirely surprised, so excited, that she could not tell whether she liked the idea or not; but, with a desperate presence of mind, contrived to laugh off her embarrassment, assuring her hearers that "it was all news to her," she was "too busy to mind village talk," and that "some folks would die if they couldn't fix up other people's affairs, an' it's safe to b'lieve jest a third of what you hear."

After leaving the kitchen, she sat down upon the narrow stairs, in the dark, to recover breath and balance before confronting the girls. She might as well have sought quiet under the saw-mill opposite : its rattling shafts, whirling wheels, and foaming, roaring water, were not more confusing than her own conflicting thoughts and wishes. Realizing this after a moment, she covered her face with her hands, and gasped under her breath, "O God of the fatherless, fix it all the best way for *her* good, an' deliver me from selfishness an' meddlin'. Amen." Somewhat composed by this, she lifted the latch, and found to her relief that Pen had gone out, and Lally was asleep on the sofa. Closing the door softly, she tiptoed into the back-room, and relieved her excitement by stirring up and frying some of the girls' favorite drop-cakes for their early tea. It was dusk when Pen returned and Lally awoke, and Samanthly hastened to deliver her message before the lamp was lit. She could hardly have met the innocent eyes of her favorite, with her new secret on her mind, and, as it was, felt like a

arch-conspirator as she extended the minister's invitation. Pen, shrinking from a holiday in the house so doubly solemnized by death within the year, as well as from being a guest where so long a hostess, looked in silence at her sister. But Lally, feverishly eager for change of scene, and even of fare, and impatient—since cold weather—of her present narrow quarters, impulsively answered, —

“Oh how nice! tell him yes, and thank him: shan't she, Pen? Won't it be good to dine there once more, and have a grand set-out of pies in Samantha's best style? If only Hiram could get a furlough in time to come too.”

So it was settled; and Samantha trudged thankfully home, muttering, as she crunched the crisp snow-crust under her resolute feet, —

“I b'lieve 'twould be the best thing for Lally, but O Lord! I can't fix it to look right for our Penny to settle down with a cut-an'-dried man o' *his* age,—hair brindled a'ready, an' three great children to stepmother to, an' all the women in the perrish peckin' and criticisin' every new bunnit

an' gown, jest as they did her poor mother's; an' yet, take it t' other way, he's a good stiddy-goin' man, easy tempered, *as men go*, never meddlin', nor yet forgettin', like the poor Elder, an' havin' wore out one wife, all the more likely to be kinder keerful of another. 'Twould be the ol' home, too, an' no more school-keepin', an' everybuddy respectin' her, an' me allus round to see 't she didn't overwork herself; yes, if onny she k'n take a notion to him, I dunno but what it's the best" —

"Hullo, S'manthy," called out Eben Kilburn, dashing swiftly past her, face down, on his "clipper" sled, "letter from Hiram for you on the kitchen dresser."

Samanthy turned red, though safe in the twilight, and in the shade of her big, green, merino pumpkin-hood. "Hiram!" She had forgotten him in her new air-castle. *What would he say?* She walked into the house, feeling suddenly tired and depressed.

CHAPTER XV.

“To despair of the great, and sell unto the mean !
O thou of little faith, what hast thou done ?”

Dipsychus. — CLOUGH.

THE Thanksgiving party passed off very happily. Samantha's eyes were wide open now, and she became sure that Mrs. Flanders was right in supposing the minister “meant something,” but wrong in thinking that Pen was aware of it. The excitement of so large a party did Lally good,—raising her spirits, and increasing her appetite ; and Pen, seeing her sister so bright, beamed with gentler happiness, and found the day less trying than she had feared. Mr. Kilburn was not forgetful of his lost wife, whose thin, faithful hands had prepared so many Thanksgiving dinners for him in former years ; and, as he asked a blessing on

the food, tears were in his eyes for her sake ; yet, before the sun set, he had twice said to himself, "I *must* have a mother for Cordelia and the boys, and who would they love so well as *She*? who is there in town, I could so gladly call my wife?" The weather, which had been bright until noon, changed suddenly during dinner, and by three o'clock the sky was dark, heavy snow-flakes began to fall, and the wind grew bitterly cold. Mrs. Flanders whispered to Pen that, if they meant to reach home without getting wet, they had better start at once. Quick-eared Cordelia, leaning on Pen's shoulder, cried, —

"Stay all night, dear Miss Pen! You *would* get wet, and then Lally would be sick. Say yes! Samantha, mustn't they stay? See how deep the snow is, and the wind blowing like every thing."

She was not to be hushed : Mr. Kilburn and Samantha added their advice and earnest invitation ; and Lally, who no longer refused to be considered an invalid, was so evidently willing, that

Pen, anxious and loving, could not refuse. The minister, greatly pleased, now insisted on taking Mrs. Flanders and Clary home in his sleigh, offering to bring back whatever the girls desired; and, though the widow protested that she and Clary "never dreamed of not walking," and had brought two pairs of the departed Flanders's socks to draw over their boots, they were presently tucked snugly under the bear-skins, and went off, nodding and winking unspeakable fun and satisfaction to Samantha, behind Mr. Kilburn's broad shoulders.

Cordelia and Samantha now went upstairs to prepare for their guests; the boys, wearied by so many hours of company behavior, sought the freedom of barn and corn-chamber, professedly to pick out some good popping ears, Pen having admitted that she liked to pop corn; Lally, feeling the reaction from her unwonted gayety, soon fell asleep on the parlor sofa; and Pen, after carefully covering her, strayed into the kitchen, and sat down by the fire, to dream over old times.

How good it was to see the blazing logs ; the familiar crane and pot-hooks ; the kettle singing as it swung ; the sturdy iron andirons, and red-brick hearth, — so much more cosy and homelike to her eyes than the pert cooking-stove they had at the Hollow. Oh, how many other winter twilights she had sat here ! She seemed again to feel the little shawl around her waist, as when Hiram tied her into the chair while he set the table. Surely her father was in his study, only waiting to be called, and Lally would soon come dancing in. Then her thoughts wandered to Clayton — and Aunt Virginia — the war — and presently John Stedman's earnest letter began to repeat itself in her ears. Where was he now ? Were his thoughts of her angry and unforgiving ? Would he go alone to his western work, a gloomy, embittered man for her sake ? Or could it be he would resign those prospects, and perhaps go into the army as chaplain, or even as private. in his disappointment ? Her cheeks began glow ; her eyes were wet ; the fire was

scorching: she pushed back her chair, and took up a newspaper to screen her face. She glanced at it, to divert her mind from this dangerous theme. Only at night must she think of John,—only when she prayed that God would bless and comfort him. She read idly of “news from the front”—of blockade-runners seized—of the high prices of provisions—marriages—deaths.—“*What?*”

“In Lebanon, 20th inst., by Rev. Cephas Barnes, Mr. John Stedman, of L., to Miss Sarah Turner, daughter of Deacon Nathan Turner, &c.”

Pen sat quite still, reading these words over and over, too stunned to suffer, feeling as if the whole world were slipping away from her—nothing solid left. Waves of rainbow colors seemed to run over the paper; a rushing sound in her ears confused her; her lips and hands were cold and numb: but she clung to the sheet, struggling against these strange sensations, and whispering,—“It is some mistake; but I must read it again before any one comes.” Now

the words are clearer ; yes, it must be true, she remembers Sarah Turner perfectly, — a little girl, with pretty face, and long light curls, and coaxing, affectionate ways ; always helped in her lessons by the other girls : one who was satisfied with her day, if she were not marked deficient, a shallow, sweet-tempered plaything of a girl ; and now she is John's wife ! Pain began to stir through bewilderment, — maidenly, mortified pain. And she had been fearing he would do some desperate thing ! She started to her feet with the swift stab of shame. No need now to pray that he might be comforted ! Some one is coming ! She hastily thrust the paper under a pile of others, as if it could betray her, thereby giving Mr. Kilburn a long search for it, when every one else had gone to bed. The white-cedar water-pail stood brimming on the corner table, with its floating cocoa-nut-shell dipper, just as it always had when Pen was a little girl, rushing in, heated and thirsty, from a frolic in the dusty hay with Hiram, and had to stand on tip-

toe to reach it. Instinctively she turns to it now, to hide her face and cool her dry throat, as the boys come noisily in with their corn ; Mr. Kilburn follows, and hands her a bundle from home, and then Samanthy, to set the tea-table, and Cordelia to help, and to hang around her friend. The confusion was most welcome, and enabled Pen to bear her usual part in the evening's cheerfulness. She joined in the corn-popping, after supper, with a dexterity that won the admiration of the children, though they protested that she ate very little, when the work was done. How should they know, that, as her firm hand shook the popper steadily to and fro over the glowing embers, the regular hissing of the kernels on the wires seemed ever singing to her ears a monotonous refrain, — "John-Sted-man — Sa-rah-Turner — John-Sted-man — Sa-rah-Tur-ner," till she feared she should call the words aloud ; feared lest Lally, too, should hear what they were saying.

December and January went by with the usual alternations of freezing and thawing, snow, rain, and sunshine; and Lally's cheeks flushed and paled, and her spirits rose and fell, with the capriciousness of her disease.

Pen had bound her own new pain hand and foot, and shut it away in the innermost chamber of her memory, where only God and herself might enter. She had borne unflinchingly the trial of hearing the marriage discovered and discussed by Lally and Clary.

"Such a queer match: why, she was always as afraid of him as she could be!"

"I suppose her pretty face bewitched him: he must know how stupid she is."

"She might have sent us cards: don't you think so, Pen?" &c.

But Lally soon forgot all about it. Nothing interested her long now. The weather was much more important than John Stedman's marriage. If the day were fair, perhaps I Hopkins or Mr. Kilburn might come and ta

her to drive, or she might hope to see Cordelia or Samanthy coming to the Hollow. If it stormed, she pined for the old home, or talked wistfully of how brightly the sun was shining in Norfolk, — crocuses and anemones in bloom, perhaps, — when should they hear again from Aunt Virginia? When would this weary war be over? and oh! how small these rooms were! Why had they ever sold the old place? These homesick longings tortured Pen unspeakably when they were vague and apparently hopeless to both Lally and herself; but this pain was as nothing to that she felt when Mr. Kilburn made known his wishes, and she was forced to realize that “no” to him would disappoint her darling sister, and not only exile them both forever from the old home, but throw the blame of such banishment upon herself alone.

It was one February afternoon, while giving Lally a sleigh-ride, that the minister fully explained himself, and gave her a letter for Pen, containing a formal proposal, and the request

that she would take as much time as she pleased to consider it. "*You* want to marry our Pen? *You?*" cried Lally, with a flash of her old eagerness, when with some stumbling, and in reply to some loving word of hers, as they passed the parsonage, he intimated that it was his dearest wish to have both sisters return there, and that it depended only on Miss Penny to name the time when she should once more be its mistress. He flushed so deeply at the unconscious scorn of her tone and glance, that she checked herself abruptly, and presently stammered, —

"Oh, please forgive me! but you know she is all I have; and I never dreamed that you — and I don't suppose any one would seem to me quite good enough for her."

"I am perfectly aware that I am twenty years older than your sister," he gravely answered, accepting her apology with a quiet bow; "but I hope that does not prevent me from appreciating her lovely character, or render me incapable caring for her happiness, and protecting her, and you too, from the hardships of life."

Lally was hushed into embarrassed silence, as he presently continued to plead his cause with an earnest eloquence that amazed her, urging the love and preference his children already felt for Pen, the advantages to both families of keeping Samantha permanently, the added comforts Lally could command in a large family and house, to say nothing of the satisfaction and approval of the whole parish in such a union. Moved by the manly sincerity of his words and face, ashamed of her own rudeness, half-convinced by his pleading, Lally said not a word till they reached the house, then, as he lifted her out, and fairly carried her from the sleigh to the parlor, he whispered, —

“You will give her my letter to-night?”

“Yes, — oh certainly, — yes.”

“And you will try and not prejudice her against me?”

“I will try.”

Whereat he smiled so very pleasantly, and set her down so gently, adding, “Good-night, then:

you are sure you are not too tired?" that impulsive Lally changed on the spot from his judge to his advocate, wondered that she had never noticed before what expressive gray eyes he had, and thought, "Oh, how comfortable it is to be carried when one is tired! How nice and strong he is!"

CHAPTER XVI.

"With such causes for disquiet in her young heart and brain, it is not then wonderful that she should sometimes be unable to slip across the troubled region of the night in the boat of her dreams, but should suffer shipwreck on the waking coast, and have to encounter the staring and questioning eyes of more than one importunate truth."

Marquis of Lossie, by GEORGE MACDONALD.

ONE warm, damp night in the following April, Pen was lying awake, thinking, or rather trying not to think. She had slept off the slight physical fatigue of a day indoors, having been prevented, by the dislike of leaving Lally, from taking the out-door exercise which alone could insure her prolonged unconsciousness.

That prisoned pain of hers was stirring now, requiring to be fought down once more. Nor was it the Past alone that she must fight: her imagination relentlessly sketched for her the

years of *a Future without Lally*. How could she bear them? How soon would they begin? How much longer could the Messenger be kept outside? Was it not in April their mother had been called, and had not Dr. Hopkins said that Lally inherited her constitution? Was it not already April, and Lally almost as old as her mother had been? Had Pen done all she could to prolong and make happy her sister's life? Would it have been better if she had accepted Mr. Kilburn two months ago? For she had refused him, decidedly, and been haunted ever since by the fear that both Lally and Samantha were sorry she had done so. To make matters worse, the minister never seemed to consider the question settled, but continued to pay her open attention; and had said to her only the day before, — "I can't give you up so easily. I am both obstinate and patient. I will not hurry you; but I must hope you will yet be kinder." Was he waiting for Lally's death to render her so lonely she should not care what she did?

Was the Hollow an unwholesome place? Would Lally find it easier to breathe on higher land, as she thought she should? Or would a journey South be possible? If Dr. Hopkins thought Florida would save her, surely it would be right to take the principal of their money! No matter if it only prolonged her life a few years; if those years were comfortable, Pen would gladly risk all, and teach, or go into a factory, if need were, afterwards. *Afterwards!* Could she, must she, live *afterwards*? And what if poverty came before Lally were taken? What whisper was that she had heard of the possible failure of the savings-bank, and the depreciation of the stocks which represented their little all? Samanthy was old, sewing uncertain, her own health not infallible. Lally ought to have the use of a horse, too, and the help of strong arms within call. Mr. Kilburn would gladly give her both. Pen had fully expected that both her sister and Samanthy, to say nothing of Mrs. Flanders and Clary, would be shocked at the

idea of her marrying so old a man ; but, though in some way they all knew about his offer, no such feeling had ever been expressed. On the contrary, she was sadly sure they were all sorry when she refused it. Even now, Lally was always praising him, and looking wistful when he went away. "Am I very wicked, ungrateful, selfish?" cried poor Pen, shedding bitter tears in the dark. "Shall I not think first of her, and please her while I can! O God? show me what I ought to do!"

Suddenly Lally started up, struggling, as she often did, with some frightful dream, panting for breath.

"Oh, the shell! the shell! Clayton! Clayton!"

"Here, darling," cried Pen, soothing and supporting her. "Wake up, Lally! You are at home with me, dear!"

"O Pen, is it you? I am stifling! Open the west window, please, quick! Let me feel the air right from Bald Mountain. It seems as if it would do me good."

“Bald Mountain, darling? Why, we are in the Hollow, — don’t you remember? — and the windows look south.”

“In the Hollow? Oh, that is why I cannot breathe! This room is so low and so little! How free and fresh the wind used to be at home; and we could see so many miles away! I am so tired of looking into this alder brush, and at the old saw-mill. They are too near, — they press upon me, Pen! Is the window open? I cannot feel any breeze. There never is any here, I think. Oh, how I wish we were little girls again, going up in the high pasture after raspberries with Hiram! Oh, how sweet the air was, and how well and strong we were!”

The poor girl began to cry, — not violently, but softly, forlornly, and hopelessly, rending Pen’s heart as she vainly opened windows and doors, tried fanning and cologne, and heaped up all the pillows. At last Lally felt relieved, and thought she could sleep once more.

“But promise me one thing, Pen,” she urged,

as she sank back ; “ one thing that is on my mind, and if you say ‘ yes ’ I will never speak of it again.”

“ Tell me, dear : if I possibly can, I will.”

“ Promise me, then, to have my name cut on the side of our monument that is towards the South, nearest poor Clayton, and what he loved and died for. It is so strange Father did not think to have Mother’s cut there ; but her name is on the east side, and his is on the north : strange you never noticed it, Pen ! and you will have mine as I say ? Now I breathe better ; lie down, dear, and we will both sleep again ;” and she did indeed fall into a quiet slumber, but there was none for Pen. Kneeling beside her sister, she prayed long and earnestly that she might put self aside, and live only for Lally ; worn out with sorrow and watching and doubt, — her mind weary and clouded by sleeplessness and distress — was it strange that she resolved to end the struggle, to accept Mr. Kilburn, and that she mistook the sense of rest that followed for the

peace of an approving conscience? "I asked to be shown," she thought, "and that moment Lally waked, and cried for her old home. Was it not a sign to show me my duty?"

The first news that greeted her, after breakfast, was of the suspension and probable failure of the G—— Bank, and she knew that if this proved true the Florida plan would be impracticable, even if Dr. Hopkins approved. It was Samantha who brought the report ; and, though she strove bravely to conceal her agitation and dismay, Pen saw that she was greatly shocked, and thought, "I can give her a good home if I choose, and do I not owe it to her? Surely I ought to be happy if I can please Lally, and save this truest of friends from an old age of struggle." Then she remembered Hiram ; but, in her present morbid mood, it was easy to believe that he would die as poor Clayton and Beethoven had, or that, if he returned safely, he would marry some one who would be ungracious to Samantha. Evil was far easier to fancy than good, that sultry, foggy

morning, when Lally was suffering for breath, and too languid (for the first time) to get up ; and Samantha's face looked gray with anxiety ; and Hiram's usual letter had been overdue for several days. About eleven o'clock, Lally felt better, and fell asleep ; Samantha declared that Pen should not "lift a finger towards gettin' dinner, for you're as white as a ghost, and may jest go straight to the parlor sofy and lay down till I call you. You don't ketch me spendin' another night to the minister's, not if Cordely drops *two* flat-irons on her foot ! So there ! Yes, I *can* hear Lally ef she stirs, an' I don't want no help. It'll do me good to wrastle with that plaguey cookin' stove, and git about seven different kinds of stuff started to wonst. I'll git *one* good meal o' vittles, ef we all go to the county-farm tomorrer, onny I *do* wish I hed the man that built that chimbley, and them there bank directors here, an' that I was a mashin' 'em all up under this iron pestle," she exclaimed, braying fiercely away at some mace in her mortar.

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"Go 'long, Penny, an' do as you 're bid." Wondering at the elaborate bill of fare evidently in progress, but anxious to write her letter to Mr. Kilburn, and send it before another night of self-reproach, Pen obeyed. She had thought over so carefully what she would say, in her morning vigil, that she only tore up two beginnings, and finally wrote as follows:—

"DEAR MR. KILBURN,—If you do indeed care enough for me to make me your wife, when I can offer you only respect, gratitude, and allegiance in return; when I frankly own that I am thinking most of my sister's comfort and happiness, and that half of our little property is now in peril in the G—— Bank,—I will promise to be a faithful wife to you, and a loving mother to the children. If, however, you find on reflection that I ask too much, and offer too little, I shall not blame you for withdrawing your proposal.

"Yours with cordial regard,

"PENSEROSA MASON."

Enveloping, sealing, and addressing this letter, she put it into her pocket, lay wearily down, and presently, hearing a step outside and a careful

knock, thought, "It is Samantha, and she thinks I have been sleeping all this time." Smiling rather sadly, she rose and walked towards the door, feeling as if she were now indeed entering on the new life to which she had pledged herself, leaving behind her all the romance, the freedom, and alas ! the truth, of her girlhood. Henceforth she must act a part, live a lie ; but it was in a good cause, and that must give her strength. The door opened from outside as her hand touched it, and there stood Hiram, in his soldier dress, straight, bronzed, beaming, the very embodiment of happy old times, of faithful affection, of strength, and truth, and safety, — holding out both eager hands, but quite speechless with joy.

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CHAPTER XVII.

“And we ’ll all be gay
When Johnny comes marching home.”

POPULAR SONG.

AT the shock of this unexpected sight, Pen
wavered visibly, and turned so pale that
Hiram involuntarily put his arms around her ;
and, as for a moment her head rested on his
shoulder, he timidly kissed her cheek, uttering
a soft little inarticulate note of tenderness, such
as you may hear a mother make when her babe
nestles in her neck. This was such a surprise
to both, that they instantly recovered them-
selves, and went quickly into the kitchen with
flushed cheeks and heads unusually erect. There
they learned that Lally was so delighted by the
news of Hiram’s return, that she was dressing

to come down to dinner ; and Pen going to help her, and Hiram assisting Samantha with a camp-acquired skill, which even she acknowledged, all four were soon seated around the table, with a sense of grateful joy in their re-union which drove away all anxiety, gave edge to their appetites, and made them talk faster and more merrily than they had since the good old days before Lally went to Norfolk, and the family changes began.

“ I’ll tell you what this seems like,” cried Lally at last, — “ that Thanksgiving time before the war, when Samantha was getting well, and we were so glad to have her downstairs again, and Pen and I were so proud when she praised our pies.”

“ How odd it is, Samantha,” said Pen, “ that you should have happened to make Hiram’s favorite ‘ pan-dowdy ’ pudding to-day, and have set the sponge for the tea-cakes he used to ask for.”

“ Well, I don’t mind ownin’ up now, that the

Doctor he sent me word this mornin' that he'd hed a telegraft, sayin' that *Miram Jackson* was on his way to Beebury, an' he kinder mistrusted the stoopid folks that works the wires must a' meant Hiram Jackman ; but I worn't a-goin' to let on to you gals afore 'twas certain sure."

"You see," explained Hiram, "our Major Russell, who 'most died of Chickahominy fever, was able to bear the journey home, but wasn't fit to travel alone ; and so I was detailed to take care of him as far as Boston, and allowed a week's leave to come on here and see the folks. We come along by easy stages, 'count o' his bein' so weak, an' that gave me a chance, Lally, to see Washington, an' — where else do you guess?"

"O Hiram ! Norfolk?"

He nodded.

"And Aunt Virginia?" she added, with such carnation cheeks and shining eyes that Pen and Samantha exchanged glances of hope and admiration.

"Now you've guessed it, sure enough," said Hiram; "an' you'd better believe she gave me a welcome and a half! Kep' me to tea, and asked me forty-'leven questions 'bout you all; an' there was two black auntys a-peekin' in the door-crack, an' wantin' to know how Miss Lalla was, an' when she was comin' agin. An' after tea, in come a tall black-eyed man, with long gray mustarchers, makin' himself quite free-an'-easy like; an' your aunt kind o' colored up, an' interduced him: now guess again, Lally!"

"It was one of the Navy-Yard officers!"

"No, 'twas an army man, a surgeon, — Union, too; an' his name's Doctor Stockbridge; an', fust thing you know, he'll be your Uncle Stockbridge. Certain, true," he added, as the girls stared at him and each other, in unbelieving surprise, and Samantha cried "Nonsense!"

"Your aunty told me so herself, an' said she'd ben meanin' to write to you 'bout it that very night, but now I could bring the news; an

here's a little note, for an Amen like, to clinch it, I s'pose."

He handed Pen a rose-colored billet; and Lally, leaning on her shoulder, as she had when the first letter came, five years before, read as follows:—

"MY DEAREST GIRLS,— It is indeed true, as your excellent, and *so* improved friend will tell you, that your foolish, *impulsive* Aunty has consented to give her *broken remnant* of a heart to the *noblest of men*. It is partly *your fault*, you darlings, for it was during my visit to you that I first learned to love the North, and to appreciate the *sterling* virtues of New-England character. My *only* regret is the thought of what *poor dear* Clayton would say to my marrying a *Union officer*; the darling fellow was *such* an *inveterate rebel*, and ever blaming my *lukewarmness* in *the Cause*, as he would say. And yet you know how he loved you; and perhaps he sees more clearly *now*, and does not care for the old distinctions. My motherly heart will find *some* consolation in these new ties, for Morris (the Doctor) has two *sweet* daughters at home, aged fifteen and seventeen, besides a son in Europe. I long to give you know them all. You cannot fail to love each other; and, when this *cruel war* is *quite* over, shall hope to see you in our Philadelphia home.

With best regards to good Dr. and Mrs. Hopkins,
and your faithful Samantha,

“I am unchangeably

“Your fond Aunt,

“VIRGINIA.”

Nor was this all that Hiram brought. After consultation with Pen, and making sure that it would give Lally more pleasure than pain, he produced from the inner compartment of his pocket-book a cluster of tiny pressed clover-leaves and grasses from Clayton's grave, which he had sought out and visited for her sake; and when his trunk came there were presents for all. For Samanthy, a case of English scissors, of five sizes; for Pen, a gold thimble, and a copy of Jean Ingelow's poems; for Lally, a white Shetland shawl, and a drippingly fresh-looking colored print of water-lilies on a blue background. His gratitude and deep satisfaction when he saw what pleasure his gifts gave, was a touching sight; and, when Pen said, for the third time, “How *could* you know so well what we all liked and wanted?”

he confessed that it had been the comfort of many a wet or half-frozen hour of sentry duty to plan what he would take to them if he lived to get his pay and return. "I've ground S'manthy's shears too many times not to know what store she sets by sharp scissors, an' don't you 'member my steppin' on your little silver thimble long ago, Penny, or don't you s'pose I've noticed how you always cut out pieces with that name in the paper? The minit I saw them lilies I thought of Long Pond, an' how Lally usedter love to go there for 'em."

In listening to Hiram's army stories, and in answering his many questions of village friends, the afternoon and evening passed happily and swiftly away, around a snapping wood-fire in the little parlor they shared with Mrs. Flanders and Clary. At nine o'clock, Lally declared that she felt as if she had been to three sewing-circles and a quilting-bee, and must go to bed; Mrs. Flanders and Clary said good-night too, and Pen was about following her sister, when Samanthy said, —

"I've got bread to mix, Penny, an' ef you'll set with Hiram till I come back I c'n see to all Lally wants to the same time, an' then we three'll hev a spell more o' talk ; nine o'clock ain't sleepy-time for well folks, specially when they've got a year's doin's to simmer over."

"But her medicine, and the night-lamp, and the window," demurred Pen.

"Now, Penny Mason ! jest as ef I couldn't do all thet as well as you ! Don't you be so dretfle set. Ef you don't look out you'll get to be as fussy-partic'lar as ol' Seth Eaton."

"Why, what did he do ?" laughed Pen, submitting to be pushed down into the easy-chair Lally had left.

"Oh, he allers dipped his ol' cat into a pail o' water afore he put her oud' doors at night, for fear she'd set the buildin's a-fire with the sparks in her fur."

So Hiram and Pen remained ; and, in the silence that fell upon them, she suddenly remembered the letter in her pocket.

It seemed a year since she had written it, — so far had the healthy happiness of the afternoon driven back the memory of those hours of morbid strain. “I must do it before I sleep,” she thought. “Hiram’s coming makes no real difference; for his kindness cannot cure Lally, or alter my duty to her,” and, with desperate resolution, she drew out the letter, and, trying to speak carelessly, said, —

“O Hiram, if you are going to sleep at the Doctor’s, will it be much trouble to leave this note for me as you go by?”

“’Twon’t be any Hiram that I ever heerd on ef your arrands is any trouble,” he returned, leaning forward to take it, and smiling in her face. One who loved her less might not have seen the hunted look in her eyes, the rigid pallor round her mouth; but Hiram did, and involuntarily glanced at the address on the letter for explanation. “Rev. Caleb Kilburn”? Could it be that he owed the girls for the rent of the parsonage? No: Hiram was quite sure they had sold it to the

parish, and had had no business dealings with the minister. Why should Pen write to him? A sealed letter, too; no mere note about Samanthy's coming or going: a message or a note to Cordelia would have been enough for that. Hiram stood thinking, frowning at the fire, and Pen sat silently trembling, her security in the righteousness of her decision growing weaker every instant, as she seemed to see it in the light of Hiram's honest good sense. Suddenly a thrill of intelligence went through him. "Was this what the jokers at the post-office had meant when they greeted his arrival that morning, and hoped he hadn't stayed away too long, and one had asked if he'd come home to the wedding? It could not be! *His* Penny, whom he had worshipped at such a distance, won by that old hypocrite of a widower! She *never* could! And yet—why this letter, this agitation?" As these thoughts scorched him, he felt that he must know all, and at once. He turned upon her almost fiercely; bashfulness, civility, discretion

—all consumed in a moment by his jealous love, his care for her happiness.

“Why do you write to him, Penny?” he began abruptly. “Is it true what those fools in the village hinted to me, that this sneaking parson wants you for—for”—he stamped his foot, he could not say *wife*—“for a step-mother to his childun, when their own hasn’t ben dead a year,—poor drudge that she was!”

“Hiram, you must not speak so!” cried Pen, with a desperate attempt at dignified reproach; then suddenly breaking down and covering her face, as she met his searching glance, at once wrathful and loving.

“I know I’m rude, Penny, but I can’t help it: I must know. Your father always said I was to look after his girls; an’ I’ve a right to know if you’ve bin an’ promised yourself away, all out of your tender-heartedness, that couldn’t never say ‘no’ to a dog, if he wanted the dinner off your very plate.”

“Hush, Hiram!” she replied, rising, and recov-

ering herself somewhat: "you forget that I am a woman now, and can take care of myself. I know you are the faithfulest of friends; but I must decide this alone. Mr. Kilburn is a good, honorable man, who can take better care of Lally and me than we can of ourselves."

Hiram flung up his hand in denial; but she went steadily on, though the flashing reproach of his honest gray eyes, usually so shyly down-cast, was hard to meet.

"He has cared for me a long time, and been very patient and unselfish about it," — Hiram smiled bitterly, — "and thereby won my entire confidence and respect; and so I have made up my mind" —

"To have him? And you've told him so in *this*?" cried Hiram, at the end of his self-control, holding the letter at arm's length.

"Yes."

"Then here it goes!" he cried, and threw it into the hottest part of the glowing embers, stamping it among them with a fierce and reck-

less foot. "And now, Penny Mason," — he folded his arms and turned upon her — "even if you hate me forever, I will tell you the whole truth to-night. Ever sence you was a little mite of a girl, you 've ben too willin' to lay yourself down for Lally to walk on. The best clo'es, an' the biggest apple, an' the easiest seat, must allers be Lally's, an' any thin' at all was good enough for you, you thought ; an' you wouldn't hurt nobody's feelin's, no matter how they put upon you. I've watched you your whole life long, and so's Samanthy, an' many's the time you'd a-hed nothin' ef we hadn't a-looked out for your rights. Now, do you suppose, jest because you're a woman grown, an' the things you've got to deal with are bigger an' more serious-like than apples, an' gowns, an' all that, that we're enny more a-goin' to let you give up, an' be walked over by every selfish creetur that comes whinin' round? *No*, I tell you !"

He paused an instant, out of breath ; and Pen hurried to say, —

"Samanthy approves of Mr. Kilburn."

“Then Samanthy’s in her dotage, an’ I’ve got her to tutor too,” he retorted; and, wiping his flushed face, went on. “She’s mebbe led away, as the best o’ women will be, by the idee of a good house, an’ lots of furnishin’, an’ bein’ the minister’s wife, an’ the leadin’ lady in the perrish, an’ all that; but I know better. It sounds dretful rich an’ easy, I know; but there’s hard work, an’ long days, an’ settin’ up to mend o’ nights, an’ tendin’ sick childun, an’ waitin’ on no end o’ visitors, an’ bein’ pecked and pried at, an’ like as not turned out to seek your fortin’ somewhere else, jest as you think you’re sotted for life. And you ain’t cut out for nobody’s drudge, Penny; you ain’t none o’ these snappy, wiry ones, that’ll answer back, an’ hold their own. It wouldn’t take many ugly words nor hard looks to break your sperrits. Ef I b’lieved you raly an’ truly loved that man, I’d hold my tongue, an’ try to bear it; for love’ll carry sech as you over burnin’ mountings. But you don’t show no signs of it, Penny: you’re too honest to purtend

it. An' ef you could make up that sweet mouth o' yourn to enny sech story, I should find you out in a minnit; for I know too much, by my own feelin's, what the real thing is. Yes, Penny; now I've got goin', I'll say right straight out what you know a'ready; an' that is, that I've loved you a sight better than my life, as long as you can remember. There ain't enny pain I wouldn't go through to please you; an' God knows I most forgit Him, when I git thinkin' of you. There ain't a word nor a look you've ever give me that I don't remember; an' yet I swear to you I never once dreamed of askin' you to give me any thin' but friendly kindness. I ain't so stupid as to s'pose I could make you happy, when all your ways an' feelin's is so dif'runt; an' I've made up my mind to take my comfort in givin', an' not in receivin', so long's I live. Amen." Pen was crying now, and had sat down again. "Now, do you s'pose, feelin' that way, that I c'n stan' still, an' see you throw yourself away on somebody else, who hain't known you two

years, whose fust wife ain't hardly cold, who's too old to drorr out your nat'ral affections, — an ol' cut-an'-dried codger, who'll be havin' a wig an' false teeth 'fore you're thirty, — an' all because he's sneak enough to come whinin' round when you're kinder low an' helpless, an' he's got eyes to see that you're the pootiest an' best girl in the perrish, an' knows you're soft-hearted too? O' course not! You think he'll break his heart, I s'pose, ef you say 'No.' I tell you, he'll suit himself with the fust good-lookin' widder that chooses to set her cap at him. Never you bother your tender little heart 'bout *his* sufferin's!" Hiram had tried to adopt a lighter tone, as he saw that Pen had been deeply moved by his confession; and he now sat silent until she spoke.

"I ought to be angry with you, Hiram, for burning my letter," she said, at last; "but you have been too good to me all my life. I can write another, but I am willing to talk it over with you first. Don't you see how Lally is pining in this shut-in Hollow, and little close rooms?

She is wearing her heart out with home-sickness for the old place, and she needs a strong man's care, and the use of a horse, and cheerful company, and many other things which she could have if Mr. Kilburn were her brother. You have seen her at her best to-day, and you don't realize how sick she is, and how she longs to be on the Hill."

"An' is *his* house the only one on the hill, Penny Mason? Ain't there other hosses, an' other strong arms,—arms that has carried her when she was a little, teenty girl, an' has a right to do it? Finds it close here in the Holler, does she? That's nat'ral enough; I never *did* see what ol' Flanders wanted to build here for: but, bless you! there's lots o' other houses where there's good air,—Mis' Buttrick's now. You know she'd jump at the chance o' havin' you an' Lally, an' Samantha too, to keep her comp'ny; an' better for Lally, too, than to be helpin' Clary here to mourn over Beethoven, an' so keep her own sorrers alive. I'll go up there fust thing

to-morrer, Penny, ef you 'll say the word, an' ask her ef she don't want to let you a couple o' rooms for the summer; an' then we'll git Lally up there to spend the day, an' ef she likes, as I'm certin sure she will, why she c'n stay right along, an' Samanthy an' I'll see to movin' the things up next day. The fresh air there'll set her up in no time: you see ef it don't, an' we'll have her pickin' up her appetite and color fast! *They've* got *two* hosses, an' ef *I* was a girl I b'lieve I should full ruther be lifted round by Uncle Si' Buttrick than by some other folks I c'd mention."

"O Hiram!" cried Pen, "it is a beautiful plan! Why have I never thought of it before? When I kept school there, I used to think the air was twice as good as anywhere else, and the smell of the hemlock woods was so sweet, she will be sure to like it; but there's another thing, — what about the Bank, Hiram? If we lose our money, we can't afford to pay for rooms there, or anywhere else." Her momentary relief gave way to the old anxiety.

“Don’t you holler ’fore you’re hurt, Penny. ’Tain’t no ways sure that ’tis goin’ to fail, an’ ef it does you won’t likely lose more’n half; an’ Mis’ Buttrick’ll ask less than Mis’ Flanders, bein’ so out o’ the village; an’ there’s the school so handy, ef you should teach you’d be close to Lally all the time, don’t you see? An’ ef hard times *do* come, Penny, don’t you really think you’d ruther have ol’ fam’ly friends like Samantha an’ me to stan’ by to help a little, ’stid o’ givin’ yourself away for life an’ all to a stranger? Wouldn’t it be a little like Esau sellin’ his birth-right for a mess o’ pottage? I’d set more store by myself than that comes to ef I was a high-toned, good-lookin’, edicated girl like you, ’pears to me; an’ s’posin’ that the worst of all that you’re afraid of comes true,” he added more solemnly, “an’ Lally’s called to foller your father, do you think she’d like to look down, an’ see you a kind o’ a bond-slave, jest for her sake? Ain’t it makin’ her out dretful selfish to think she’d take a few creeter comforts at the price o’

your liberty, not to say honesty ; for you know it's no more nor less than a lie when a girl merries that way. It goes awful hard with me to vex you so, Penny, an' make you blush an' cry, an' I never would a-b'lieved I could a-done it ; but we've got to fight this thing out, now we've begun it. An' there's two things more I've got to tell you ; one is, that ef you do merry the minister, an' Lally don't live, you'll allers have a feelin' that whatever goes wrong with you is kinder her fault : you'll think, ' Ef it hadn't a-ben for her this wouldn't be thus an' so.' It'll be like havin' a grudge agin' her as long as you live, an' that ain't the way you want'er feel to'ards enny one that's dead an' gone."

"Hiram!—Hiram!" begged the girl ; but, though she was crying bitterly, she knew he was right.

"Onny one word more, Penny, an' that's this : this war's 'bout over, an' soon I shall be comin' home for good an' all, with two strong arms, an' a lot o' money in the Bank, an' a good

trade besides my farmin' work to depend on, an' only one wish in life, an' that is to do for you an' Lally as faithful an' true as ef you was my own little sisters, an' askin' nothin' but good-will, so help me God, an' that you'll forgive all the rough words I've said to you this night." Pen sat silent, her face covered. "I'm goin' now, Penny," he said, rising. "Give me your hand for good-night an' good-will, ef you can ; but, however you feel to'ards 'me, for God's sake, for the sake o' your father and mother, who *did* love each other, don't go an' throw yourself away on this man."

He went slowly to the door, opened it, and went out ; but, before he could close it, Pen sprang up, dashed away her tears, and, following, gave him her hand, saying, —

"I am not angry with you, Hiram ; I thank you for your faithfulness, and I will at least promise you that I will not write another letter without telling you ; and — and — *will* you go and see Mrs. Buttrick to-morrow?"

"You'd better b'lieve I will," he responded heartily, clasping her hand till she winced. "Now you go right off to bed, Penny, an' don't worry your dear little head 'bout enny thin'. I'll fix it all: you see ef I don't. Good-night."

"Good-night," she said, really smiling at last, and went back into the parlor. He paused a moment in the passage. Just here they had stood that noon, when for one instant she had leaned upon him, and he had dared, for the first time in his life, to kiss her; he was thinking of it now, — he would think of it to his dying hour as the happiest moment of his life, — but only to nerve himself for a future of disinterested devotion; and, when he presently let himself out at the front door, and walked away between the bare, sighing alder-bushes which hedged the road, his square-cut, sun-burned face was fairly noble, with its steadfast look of self-forgetting resolution.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Who would have thought my shrivelled heart
Could have recovered greenness? It had gone
Quite underground, — as flowers depart
To see their mother-root, when they have blown;
Where they together,
All the cold weather,
Dead to the world, keep house alone.

Grief melts away
Like snow in May,
As if there were no such cold thing."

GEORGE HERBERT.

TWO days after this conversation, Lally sat watching the sunset from the windows of Mrs. Buttrick's great square "parlor-chamber."

"It's an old story to you, Pen, dear, for I know you've spent weeks and weeks here when you had the school; but I never lived so high, or had such a glorious view to feast my eyes upon all day. These miles and miles of hemlock woods and grand old mountains, looking

over each other's shoulders as far as I can see, seem as solemn and beautiful as the cathedrals one reads about. It will be easy to die here, though really I feel more like living just now. How peaceful it is, and yet not lonely! I can only see two roofs, and they look more like beehives than any thing else. Pen, how kind, and yet how funny, Mrs. Buttrick is! Almost as bracing as our Samanthy. I know I shall like staying here; and really, I fancy *you* look better for the change, Pen. You *must* feel a difference in the air. How could we have lived in that Hollow so long? I don't want to be ungrateful; but do you know, I was getting a little sick of Mrs. Flanders's whiny-piny voice and flattering ways? Clary is nice, of course; but her mother's way of putting her head on one side, and sighing out,—'Feel poorly, don't ye, dear?' made me *so* nervous, you can't think! And her little cackling laugh was just as bad. Yes, I know it's mean of me, Pen; but what's the use of being an invalid if you can't say just

what you please? And so I'm going to shock you still more, and confess that I'm glad to get away from the Kilburns too. I didn't mind Cordelia, though I can't say I like her as well as you do ; but the boys were getting altogether too free at our rooms, — running in and out, and slamming the doors, whenever they wanted any thing of Samanthy. By the way, she can't be forever going over there, now that we're three miles away ; and that's another mercy !”

“ But you always said you liked the minister, and how nicely he lifted you in and out of the wagon,” said Pen, rising to arrange the knotted white curtains behind her sister.

“ Oh, yes ! so he did ; but that was before Hiram came. Hiram does it a great deal better : he is so much stronger. And then, you know, he is really one of the family ; and it seems twice as easy and natural to call on him. What a dear, good fellow he is, Pen : isn't he ?”

“ He is the best friend we have in the world !” cried Pen, with a fervor that rather surprised

Lally. She would have been still more startled, could she have known how wildly her sister's heart was throbbing with relief and gratitude and self-shame, as she remembered from what Hiram had saved her.

Happy days followed in the red house on the mountain-side; days in which Lally gained in strength and cheerfulness in the keen, sweet air; and therefore Pen's heart must rejoice, although Hiram returned to his regiment for a while, and the terrible news came of the murder of Lincoln the Good.

Peace had come, summer was coming, Lally was contented and comfortable, the Bank suspended, but did not fail, Mr. Kilburn ceased to importune, and Pen's calm sweet face beamed from morning till night with joy and gratitude unspeakable. She and Lally wrote a letter of loving congratulation to Aunt Virginia, and, before June had passed, received wedding-cards, and a photograph of their new uncle, which prepossessed them in his favor. The passing

neighbor who brought them this package from the post-office was still lingering at the gate with Mrs. Buttrick, when the girls and Samanthy had finished their study of cards and picture ; causing the latter to remark, as she resumed her rag-braiding, —

“Time don’t seem to be of no account to Deacon Sawyer this arternoon. His hoss has nigh-about et up two laylock bushes, an’ there the ol’ man sets, a-noddin’ his head, an’ a-layin’ down the law ’bout somethin’ amazin, jedgin’ by the way Mis’ Buttrick’s a-holdin’ up her han’s, an’ drinkin’ of it in.”

Even as she spoke, the deacon gave the reins a jerk and a flop, detached old Sorrel from the mutilated lilac, and presently Mrs. Buttrick was heard puffing up the stairs.

“For the Luddy-massy, gals ! who *do* you think’s goin’ to be married now ? I never *was* so beat ; an’ ef it hadn’t a-been Deacon Sawyer, I donno as I’d a-believed it ! But he says he sor her himself, onny last night ; an’ he says she’s

as pleased as a hen with her fust chickens, simperin' an' tippin' her head to one side like a young gal, an' she goin' on forty-five, as I know for sure by her own sampler!"

"Who? Who, Mrs. Buttrick?" cried Lally. "Now don't say it's 'Lecty Sage, or I shall never feel sure that Samantha won't go and do likewise."

"You've got to come nearer home, Lally. But there, I can't stan' it to wait for you to guess: my flats is coolin' now. Wal, it's the Widder Flanders, sure's you live and breathe!"

The verity of the latter part of her illustration was not apparent at first; for Samantha and the girls literally held their breath, as they looked at her and at each other with wide eyes of utter amazement. Samantha rallied first, and gasped,—

"No fool like an old fool! Who's the man, for the land's sake?"

"Somebuddy else's leavin's, ef all the say-soes are true," replied Mrs. Buttrick, winking at Pen,

whose cheeks flamed suddenly with a recollection of Hiram's prophecy.

"Yes, you've guessed it, — Elder Kilburn, no less! An' not an onsuitable match, come to think on 't, is it? Nat'rally, he wants somebuddy to fly round an' fetch up them childun, an' keep things tidy; an' he's got sense enough to know that ef he can't git fust best, half a loaf's better'n no bread, — hey, Penny?"

"All well enough for *him*, I'll agree," answered Samanthy, silently swallowing a bitter pill of mental self-reproach; "but why a woman who's got safe out o' one marryin' ventur', an' sotted down in decent weeds, with a snug house' an a comf'able income, an' a likely darter like Clary to keep her company, — why *she* should want ter go sailin off agin inter the Lord knows what of changes, — that's what flustrates me!"

"Oh, as to Clary," began Mrs. Buttrick, "'tain't no ways likely she'll" — She checked herself in some confusion, adding, — "Dear sakes! my ironin'!" and disappeared down the stairs, fol-

lowed by Samanthy, who was eager to talk over the news. They were hardly out of hearing, before Pen frightened her sister by bursting into tears, and then into laughter, and then cried again, assuring Lally between her sobs, that it was nothing, nothing at all; which naturally convinced her of the exact contrary. After much soothing and coaxing, the whole story of the minister's repeated offers, her letter of acceptance, and Hiram's interposition, was told; and the twins embraced each other as if they had just gained a friendly coast, after all the horrors of a shipwreck. Becoming more calm after a while, they agreed that the match was a charmingly suitable one: Mrs. Flanders was about the minister's age, and would be as kind and faithful a mother, as the children could have. Before night, the whole village had discussed the matter, and, with one or two exceptions, come to the same conclusion. Mr. Kilburn himself was one of the malcontents, and his daughter Cordelia, was another. He had really love

Penserosa, and suffered deep mortification and disappointment in obtaining only a kind and comely housekeeper and stepmother for his family, when he had hoped to win the sweetest woman he had ever known, for his own joy and companionship. He felt that, with Pen for his wife, his whole nature would have been elevated, purified, and ennobled; while, as the husband of Mrs. Flanders, he should but sink into lower depths of the commonplace, narrow, and sordid existence so sadly common in small country towns.

Cordelia's grief was twofold: jealousy that her dead mother should be so soon supplanted, and keen disappointment that it should be by "that woman," instead of by her darling Miss Pen: for village gossip had not failed to hint to her this possibility; and she had come to love the picture, putting it, however, into a far "by and by," in reverence to the lost.

While her father strove manfully to root out his preference for the unattainable, and consoled himself, or attempted to, by the reflection that

his worldly goods would be increased instead of diminished by *this* match, while his wounded vanity was soothed by the innocently evident pride and happiness of the widow, — poor Cordelia, avoiding the ill-timed though well-meant congratulations and exhortations of the neighbors, fled, literally, to the mountains, and poured out all her woes in the arms of her best friend. It was somewhat embarrassing to Pen to be wooed by the daughter, as well as the father: but her joy in her escape enabled her to rise to the emergency; and, while giving the child many caresses, she mingled reproof with sympathy, advised submission to the inevitable, and the making of friends and allies of the truly kind and excellent widow and Clary. The distance between Mrs. Buttrick's house and the village rendered such interviews comfortably rare; and both private feeling and popular interest subsided ere many days to their ordinary placid level. The next high-tide of excitement was caused by the final return of Hiram and

Pen made suitable reply, and presently drew the kind but unobserving woman from the room, saying that Lally was more tired than usual to-night. She had seen the starting tears, and knew that her sister would like to be alone a while. Ordinarily, however, Lally was cheerful now, and so free from pain, and the troublesome cough of last winter, that Pen was completely deceived, and always looked back upon that summer as the halcyon time of her life. Lally had never been so calmly contented, so demonstratively grateful and loving to all around her. Hiram was working for Mr. Buttrick on the farm and in the saw-mill, and was always ready to help Lally from the wagon, or carry her upstairs when she was tired, besides adding immensely to the cheerfulness of the household by his invariable good temper and fund of pleasant talk. Samantha cancelled her board and lodging obligations, by assuming all the butter and cheese making of the farm, as well as the family mending, and still declared herself to be growing fat from laziness.

In view of this peril, though she was as lean and gaunt as a well-sweep, she entered upon a corrective course of braided rag-mats, in the composition of which the gravity of Mr. Buttrick's taste in gray and brown coats and trowsers was happily relieved by his wife's more florid fancy, in blue and orange gowns and red petticoats. When braiding palled, the mysterious "hooking" process was adopted, — a style admitting of endless variety of design: piebald kittens and puppies, cabbage roses, and impossibly shaded foliage, all framed in arabesques of equally daring originality and improvement (?) upon nature. Square mats, ovals, and rounds, grew under her fingers, the two choicest being intended as wedding-gifts for the future Mrs. Kilburn, and "posy-faced Clary," as Samantha often called her. Benevento was building a pretty new house in the village, on the completion of which, it was whispered, there would be a double wedding in the Hollow.

"What a mercy it is that Aunt Virginia lives

so far away, and express-rates are so high," said Lally to Pen, in strict confidence: "Uncle Stockbridge would certainly have had his bedroom, if not his parlor, long ago ornamented with Samantha's mats, — blue peonies and red cucumbers spilling out of a spotted cornucopia, if he had lived within forty miles."

CHAPTER XIX.

"How pleasant are thy paths, O Death !
Thy new restores our lost ;
There are voices of the new times
With the ringing of the old chimes
Blent sweetly on thy coast."

FABER.

THE end was nearer than even Dr. Hopkins supposed. Through the summer and early autumn, Lally was able to walk, every pleasant morning, to one or the other of her favorite resting-places. The first was the saw-mill, just across the road,—a weather-browned old building, consisting of a roof, a rear wall, and a perilously open-work floor, but ever fragrant with fresh pine and hemlock sawdust, and commanding a charming view of the forest-framed mill-pond at one end, and the escaping brook, foaming and leaping over rocks and slab-ends at the other ; while in front was the mill-yard,

always a pretty study in red and brown and green, and straw color ; with its picturesque confusion of logs with the bark on, and logs freshly peeled, piles of newly sawn boards and slabs, stacks of ruddy bark, tangled thickets of wild raspberry bushes,—which thrive in sawdust,—and a deep strew of chips and chunks of every size and kind, dear to the housekeeper's heart for kettle-boiling and oven-heating ; over all darted the swallows and pee-wees, who built their nests and reared their young, year after year, on the rafters of the mill-roof, and even on the ponderous beams below the floor, in spite of noisy wheels, whirling bands, and flying sawdust. It was a very different place from the saw-mill in the Hollow, the one standing high on the breezy mountain-side, the other half buried in alder-bushes three miles below. Lally would sit for hours on Samanthy's shawl spread over a heap of sawdust, leaning against a hemlock log, breathing the spicy smell of the wood, watching Hiram and Mr. Buttrick as they fed that never-

satisfied dragon the saw, with its one jaw flashing with relentless monotony up and down, while the Juggernaut carriage advanced and retreated with its firmly bound victim, but lately waving, in plummy pride, in the forest primeval. Hiram would often leave his work for a moment's chat with her, or to bring a leaf full of raspberries, a white lily from the pond, or vivid cardinal-flower from the brook ; and, punctually at eleven, Pen would arrive, with a cup of warm milk in which Iceland moss had been boiled, or a glass of beaten egg and wine, remaining, perhaps, to read aloud to her darling from a newspaper the Doctor had sent, or from her precious Jean Ingelow, which both knew almost by heart before the season was over. "Divided" was the poem they really loved the best, but it touched chords of past sorrows in each, too truly to be read aloud. "Brothers and a Sermon" was the one Lally most often asked for ; while the "High Tide," was the most studied by Pen, who had never seen the sea. The other favorite haunt was a

quarter of a mile down the road, where a sudden bend gave a lovely view of Beebury village below, the White Mountains in the far distance, and miles of rocky pastures, "maple orchards," and pine-clothed hills between. Hiram had arranged a comfortable seat in a gap in the stone wall, under a black-cherry tree, and here the passing farmer, or the horseback boy, returning from the grist-mill or the blacksmith's, often found the sisters, and tossed into their laps a letter from Aunt Virginia, or an illustrated paper or new magazine, addressed in a girlish hand which they had learned to associate with "the Stockbridge girls."

"I suppose they know I am sick, and feel sorry for me," Lally would say, with a sad little smile. "You must invite them here, and make friends of them, Pen, when you haven't me to fuss over." But Pen could not, would not, believe yet.

When the sun was not warm enough to allow of these out-of-door pleasures, Lally would carry

her book and her sister to the big barn, to watch Hiram husking corn, and to tease him, as of old, for "daventures," of which he now had a very creditable supply. But, late in September, came a five-days' storm, when the sun veiled himself in hopeless gray,—when the cold north-east wind came straight from the land of ice-floes, to tear off the gay mantles from the now weeping trees, and cause them to toss their bare arms aloft, as if crying for rest. The stubble fields were sodden, the cattle hung their heads in the lee of the walls, no wagon came by from the village, the small greenish window-panes streamed ceaselessly with tear-like drops, and the gale moaned and shrieked like a banshee in the chimney. Hiram tramped to and fro in the mill, in a long, black rubber coat. "He looks as if he were conducting a funeral," said Lally, with a nervous laugh. "That hemlock log on the carriage looks exactly like an unpainted coffin, Pen;" and she turned wearily on her sofa, and tried to find something more cheer-

ful inside ; but even Mrs. Buttrick's apple-face, Samantha's gayest mat-work, and Pen's choicest cookery, failed to relieve her feverish languor. She drooped like a gathered water-lily ; and, during the fifth night, the old distress for breath attacked her, and was so long-continued that Pen sent Hiram for the Doctor in great alarm. He came ; but, though Lally was relieved by what he gave her, he knew that it was but temporarily, and that the time had come when he must tell Pen that hope was no more, and she must strengthen her soul for the parting which any hour might now bring.

"It was the hardest day's work I ever did, Persis," he said to his wife that evening. "I felt like an executioner when that girl looked up at me to see if she must believe what I said,—her great brown eyes like a shot deer, and her lips whiter and tighter every moment. She gave one little moan, and held on to my arm an instant : but just then Lally called from the other room, and, if you'll believe me, she pressed her

hand hard on her lips, to stop their trembling, and walked in to the bedside with as sweet a smile as you ever saw on her face; and she'd been up all night too, Samanthy said. You women are wonderful creatures, Persis."

That day was one of such glorious, golden sunshine, of such ripened sweetness of breeze as only autumn can give, — New England autumn, where the air seems to partake of the strength of its granite, as well as of the balsamic fragrance of its forests; and, breathing it, one feels as if he might live for ever.

Resting upon her pillows, in the languid blessedness of relieved pain, Lally lay silent all day, now dropping into a gentle doze, now rousing herself to smile at Pen, who sat tirelessly by, now feasting her eyes upon the broad, peaceful landscape through the wide-opened windows, — the gaunt old mountain, the hemlocks tossing in the sunshine, and the cattle, with their tinkling bells, feeding ever nearer home as the day waned. During the following night it was much the same,

except that she spoke from time to time gentle thanks to Samanthy and Hiram, as they moved her pillows or brought her drink, but always turning back her eyes to Pen, who grew whiter and whiter, but whose answering smile never failed, whose faithful hand never faltered in its clasp on hers.

As the next day's sun rose in cloudless beauty, Dr. Hopkins rode slowly down the mountain into the village, with so sad a face, that those who stood at gates and windows to hear his report, as they had twenty-four years ago, hardly needed to hear his words, — "Lally Mason died at six this morning, like a child going to sleep."

CHAPTER XX.

Six years after.

"He, full of bashfulness and truth,
Loved much, hoped little, and desired nought."

TASSO (*Fairfax's translation*).

LETTER FROM SOPHY STOCKBRIDGE TO HER SISTER
ANNIE.

"BEEBURY, N. H., July 21, 1871.

"DEAR ANNIE, — I suppose you received the short note I wrote last week, telling of my safe arrival, and are now impatient to hear how I like the place and the people, what I am doing, and all about it. First of all then, Mamma was right, and you and I were wrong ; for I am delighted with every thing, — not a bit home-sick, and, tell Papa, have a ferocious appetite, have gained a pound in weight already, and sleep all night without waking. I feel like a different being from the cross and limpy girl you bade good-by to at West Philadelphia ; and, if you were only here, my cup of contentment would be quite full. As you are not, I must do my best at description. Fancy, then, a large, square, red house, — with white doors, eaves, and

window trimmings,—two stories high, and an immense curiosity-shop of an attic, besides ; set two-thirds of the way up a huge, rugged mountain, on a flat place just big enough for the house and barns and saw-mill, and a front-door yard full of flowers ; while behind, the ground goes up so steep that I can't understand why the snow-drifts in winter don't come sliding down, right into the kitchen windows ; but they say they don't. Downstairs there's a parlor and a dining-room,—one on each side of the front-door ; and back of both, the whole width of the house, is the jolliest and yet cosiest kitchen I ever saw. It has a great open fire-place, that I can almost walk into, and a cooking-stove too : sometimes they use one, and sometimes the other. You see, it used to be two rooms, and there are two chimneys. Of course, the fire-place is what we sit by, cold nights, (and even in July we have them here), and it is the best to pop corn and roast apples by. Warm evenings, and every afternoon, we sit in the parlor, which is a home-like and refined-looking room, though there is nothing handsome in it. My room is over the dining-room, and has two windows looking west, right on to the mountain, and one north into the woods. Cousin Pen's room looks toward the mountain, and down at the village, and is even pleasanter ; but it was her sister's room, and so she always keeps it for herself. O Annie, she is so different from what we fancied ! not the least old-maidish, or prim, or

fussy, or any thing of the sort ; and yet she is certainly thirty years old, for you know Cousin Allegra was her twin, and it says on the monument, 'aged twenty-four,' and she died in 1865. If you or I are half as pretty when we are thirty, I know I shall be thankful, and I think I shall be surprised. Why, in the first place, her hair — a lovely golden-brown — is thirty-six inches long, and mine is only twenty-seven, actual measurement by Mrs. Buttrick's yard-stick, and hers is thicker than mine too. Her complexion is fresh and pretty, — no late hours here, you know, — and she has never had dyspepsia in her life. Her eyes are the real beauty of her face, though ; and I haven't yet made up my mind whether it's because they're large and brown, or whether it's the sweet, earnest, beaming look in them. She is a very happy, even-tempered person ; and yet you can see, by the way she speaks of her sister every day, how she loved her, and is still thinking of her in all she does. It's very strange, — you know when mother died we never thought we could name her, or refer to her in any way, and we felt as if we should scream if any one else did, — but Cousin Pen talks about 'Lally's favorite flowers,' and says 'Lally would have enjoyed this,' and quotes little funny sayings of hers, and even laughs over them. I believe if I were going to die, I should rather be remembered in this way, and not have my name die out in the family. Samantha is more as I imagined she would be, for you

know Mamma had told us just how queer and keen she was ; and I won't attempt to describe her or Mrs. Buttrick. Both are funny beyond words : but yet they are never ridiculous ; you respect them all the time, somehow, in spite of outrageous grammar, and a style of dress and hair which would amaze Chestnut Street into fits. Mrs. Buttrick is not here all the time ; for she is so lonely since her husband died last summer, that she spends half her days at her son's in the village, where there are two nice little children, who divert her mind. This house really belongs to Hiram ; but Mrs. Buttrick has, by her husband's will, a life-ownership of two rooms in it, and a share in the profits of the farm. The rest of the property went to her son Ben, (not Benjamin, my dear, as you would naturally suppose, but Benevento, after a tune in the hymn book !) and Hiram bought it of him, and has improved the place a great deal,—building a little porch over the front-door, and a piazza at the side ; bringing water into the kitchen from a spring in the hill-side ; and putting in large glass at the windows. Cousin Pen says she wishes Cousin Lally could have enjoyed these : the little, old, green panes used to annoy her so ; she said she never could be sure, across the room, whether Mrs. Buttrick was coming in at the gate in her red shawl, or whether the cows were going by. Samantha told me that Cousin Pen paid for some of these changes, for she used to pay board to Mr. Buttrick ; but Hiram won't take it from her, and so

she has to do something that will add to his comfort or Samantha's instead. She sews for Samantha, too, and does some of the house-work and cooking: for she says she is healthier and happier for being busy, and on her feet part of the day; though Samantha rather opposes it, and tries to do every thing herself. One great surprise to me — and this you needn't let anybody see — is Hiram. There's no such thing as flirting with him. You know we had planned that if there was nothing else I could amuse myself with him, — 'if he is decently good-looking,' you prudently added: now, he is more than that; he is fairly handsome! — straight, brown as a nut, six feet tall, but bashful as a boy of fifteen, with a thick brown beard, a little grizzled, and gray eyes, quite merry, but very shy of looking straight at you. Eminently flirtatious, you see, as far as looks go, and bright and keen as he can be; but — alas for my vanity! — so bound up in Cousin Pen, that he pays me no more attention than he does to the humming-birds over the red balm in the garden. That garden is a queer mixture. It is actually hedged in, on two sides, with hollyhocks of every color and shade; and Cousin Pen prefers the single ones to the double, and I believe she is right. She never will have any dahlias or petunias, because Lally disliked the smell of them: but there are quantities of pansies and mignonne, and sweet-peas, and nasturtiums, and verbenas, and plenty of an old-fashioned flower called

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'four-o'clock,' to please Mrs. Buttrick ; and clove and fringe and mullein-pinks for Samantha ; roses, which Hiram likes ; and white garden lilies and heliotrope, Cousin Pen's favorites. Every Sunday, when we ride to church, we take a basketful of flowers to the graveyard, where Cousin Lally and her father and mother are buried ; but, about Hiram, — he's rather a silent man, about forty-five, I think ; quite intelligent, though far from grammatical ; full of fun, after a quiet fashion of his own, but very down-right and commonsensical ; not in the least gallant, and yet somehow you know he'd stand between you and a mad dog without thinking twice about it. He never bothers Cousin Pen, but treats her exactly as if she were some very precious, small, and delicate thing, that may get lost or broken if one is not tender and careful of it. He always calls her 'Penny ;' and yet his manner is as reverent as if he said, 'Your serene highness.' He calls all her things 'little ;' 'here's your little thimble, Penny ;' or 'give me your little shawl, Penny ;' or 'don't wet your little feet, Penny : ' and the other night when he came home after nine, all wet and tired from hunting over the mountain for a stray cow, and I stupidly mentioned that no one had been by from the post-office, he quietly slipped on another pair of boots and a dry coat, — took half a pie in his hand, and rode on horseback three miles and back ! To please me, do you suppose ? Not at all ! He remembered that it was the day for Cousin Pen's

magazine, and he almost forgot to hand me the letter from you, that happened to come too. Cousin Pen said, 'Oh, don't go, Hiram!' but he only gave his quiet laugh, and said, 'Never you bother your little head 'bout me, Penny.' He's so unselfish too. You know she has promised to spend next winter with us, if I will stay here till October: so I thought I'd punish Mr. Hiram, for his want of appreciation of my charms, by working on his feelings a little; and I went out in the barn when he was milking, and sprang it on him suddenly, that she was going home with me, and that we should try to keep her till spring.

" 'Well now, that's real nice,' said the provoking thing, and he never changed color: 'it'll set Penny up first-rate; winters here is ruther dull when we git snow-banked in; I s'pose you don't git too much snow down there; an' she c'n see all them pictures and curiosities you was a-tellin' about at dinner.'

" 'I suppose you and Samanthy won't miss her much,' said I, quite disgusted with his coolness.

" 'Oh, I guess we c'n stan' it,' he replied, milking away, quite cheerfully: 'there'll be her little letters comin' to us onct a week, you know; Penny writes a first-class kind of a letter.'

" 'Perhaps she'll get married, and conclude to stay in Philadelphia,' I said spitefully, for I began to believe he knew I was trying to tease him, and all he said was, 'So, Bossy,' to the cow he was milking;

and yet, as the Baltimore girls say, 'his sun rises and sets in her.' For all that, he is not her lover, and I'm sure she never could be his wife ; and yet they are the best of friends.

" Here it is Friday, and my letter not finished yet. I went to tea, at Mrs. Dr. Hopkins's, with Cousin Pen, last night, and we had a lovely time. The Doctor is as much of a gentleman as Papa, and his wife is as sprightly and pleasant as she can be. They both inquired very cordially for Mamma, and sent their love to her. They have plenty of books ; and I am to borrow them whenever I choose, though Cousin Pen has a good many too. She spends what would have been Lally's share of her interest money, on books or a journey, every year, and then it makes her feel as if they were presents from her sister. She lends her books freely in the village ; for she says she remembers how she and Lally used to pine for more reading when they were growing up. She means to collect all she can in her lifetime, and leave them to the town when she dies : but they are really as good as public property now, she is so kind about them. Her journey, last winter, was to Boston. Mrs. Hopkins went with her, and they stayed two weeks, and saw all the interesting places. The year before, she went to Niagara with the Ben Buttrick's, and so she makes a change for herself when she feels the need of it. She is always busy, and yet never in a hurry

or a fidget. You will think I am in love with her, and I believe I am. Every one in town loves her, and I don't wonder. Cordelia Kilburn, the minister's daughter, told me the other day that when Cousin Lally died the people were so full of sympathy for Cousin Penny, and so afraid she would be sick with sorrow, or would go away from Beebury to live, that they consulted together, and asked Dr. Hopkins what they could do for her. He had noticed that she seemed to take comfort in playing on the church organ : she had always played it Sundays, but now she would borrow the key, and go in alone on week-days, and stay a long time ; so he proposed they should combine in giving her a good one for her own, and he headed the paper with a handsome sum. Mr. Kilburn did the same, and before the week was over the whole amount was raised, and every family in town had done something. Cordelia said it was the most lovely sight to see Cousin Pen's surprise and gratitude and happiness when they gave it to her. Hiram was in the secret, and one of the largest subscribers ; and he brought her down to the post-office the day the organ came, and half the town was there to see it, and shake hands with her : but she broke down and cried so, after the first, that Dr. Hopkins carried her away, and wouldn't let her see any more. It proved the greatest comfort to her, and she has told me that it helped her to live through that first

sad winter, as nothing else could ; for there were many days when she could neither read nor sew, she missed Lally so terribly. I know Papa will admire her very much. She is just like what he always wanted us to be, — so scholarly and industrious, and always prettily dressed, without being a slave to it. Mrs. Ben Buttrick now, who is quite rich *for here*, keeps as good watch of the fashions as we do, and has really very tasteful toilettes. Her husband loves to have her, and every one else copies her as well as they can. She's very pretty and affectionate ; but Cordelia is my favorite, next to Cousin Pen, of course. She is really superior, and in a pale, severe style, quite handsome. She and I have struck up a friendship already ; and by and by I shall see her every day, for she is going to teach the Honey-Hill school, and will board here. Cousin Pen used to, and even now she often has classes in Latin or French, for the boys who are going to college, or the girls who are ambitious of going beyond mere district-school studies. Tell Papa we *do* have yeast bread here, and Samanthly is an excellent cook. Now don't ever say I haven't written you a good, long letter, — four whole sheets ! I shall expect as many in return, and all the last gossip, — who's attentive to whom, and what pieces you are taking in your music ; and whether any one inquires for me, and how you trimmed your hat for the base-ball match, and *every thing*. Give my love to Papa and

Mamma, and keep lots for yourself. Hiram is calling to Cousin Pen to 'put on her little hat,' and she says they are going to the village, and I must go too, and we'll bring Cordelia up to spend the night. I'll mail this, so good-by in a hurry, and write soon to your

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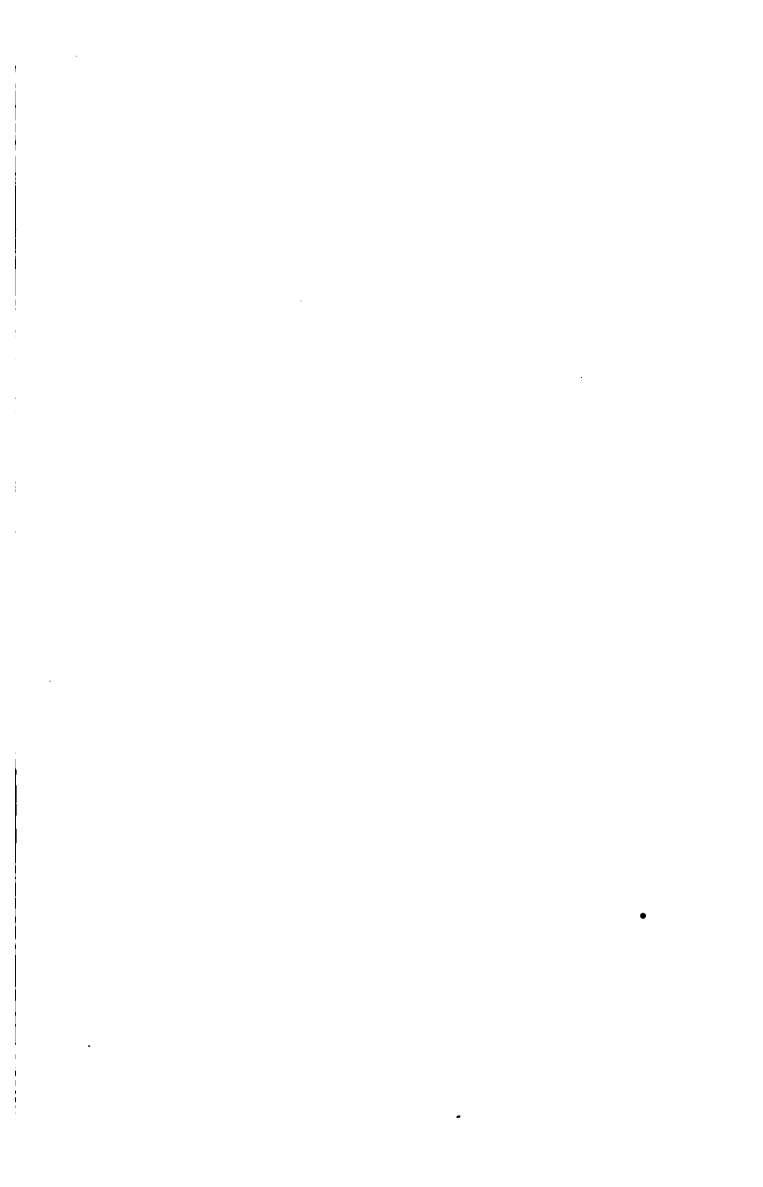
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